

# punk planet magazine

ISSUE #49 | MAY & JUNE 2002 | \$3.95 US  
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Mike Watt Federation End Original Banned from the USA Richard Hell



the rocky rise of

Variant  
records

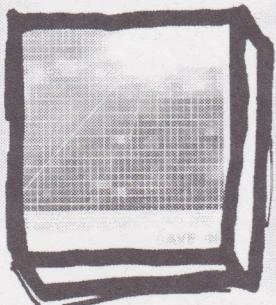
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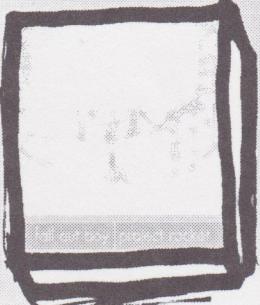
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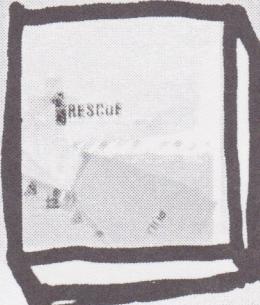
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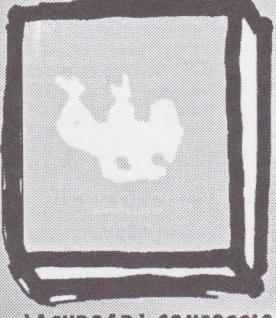
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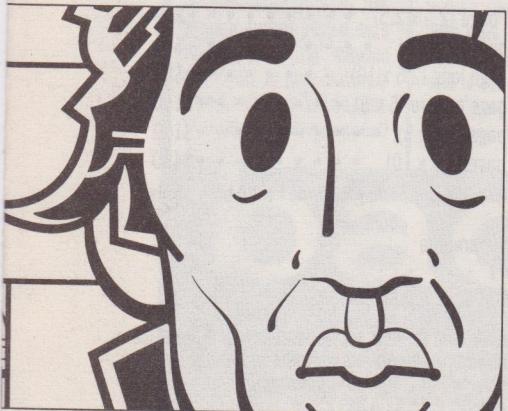
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issn number

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for PP51 September/October 2002

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the risks

# intro49

**N**ever in the eight years that *Punk Planet* has been around (that's eight this issue, by the way) have more people told me about a story running in *Punk Planet*—months before it actually came out.

"I heard you guys were running a story about Vagrant Records," says the guy across the counter while I was helping out at Early to Bed. That was in February.

"Word is you had a story on Vagrant, but you killed it." That was over e-mail in December.

"Are you still doing something on Vagrant?" An advertiser calling in early November—reserves an ad and then tosses that question in.

"This article on 'the evil Vagrant Empire' in *Punk Planet* was anything but." That's what a widely-disseminated e-mail, allegedly from the head of Vagrant Records himself, said back in October. Like seemingly everyone else on the planet, I received a copy of that in my in-box.

I could continue on for the rest of this column listing the inquiries, conjecture, and rumors I've heard about Punk Planet's story on Vagrant Records for the

last half-year. But why bother? After eight months of hard work, it's finally ready. You can read it for yourself and come up with your own opinion.

Authors Trevor Kelley and Kyle Ryan have dedicated *hundreds* of hours of their time tracking down the *whole* story behind this controversial label. I can't say I envied their position while they were at it. At times it seemed like they were on a quixotic journey that lead from one dead end to another. But their reporter's instincts told them to not back down, and they didn't. Thankfully, they didn't.

To me, the lengthy piece they turned out, "Business as Usual? The Rocky Rise of Vagrant Records", is not just about the ascent of Vagrant and the controversy that has swirled around the label since it came to prominence two years ago, but also about the state of the independent music world itself.

In the eight years that *Punk Planet* has been around, I've witnessed an increased emphasis on "professionalism" in the underground. Talking to some folks in punk today is like talking to an MBA student—it's all about SoundScan "units", getting "the right" publicity, "working" your sales, and playing music "showcases."

The rise of Vagrant Records, to me, simply reflects that emphasis.

But that's just what I think. The real payoff to Kyle and Trevor's work is that you can get *what you want* out of their story. They have given you all sides to a thorny story and it's up to *you* to choose what you make of it. That may go without saying, but I just thought I'd emphasize it anyway.

Enjoy Trevor and Kyle's story. It's amazing. Enjoy the rest of the issue as well—I think it's one of our strongest in a while.

DAN

PS. So many changes in store here at *Punk Planet*, I wish I had twice the space for this introduction. Keep it tuned to this station over the next few issues and you'll start to see the snowball rolling down the mountain. Eight years. 49 issues. Why *not* give things a good shake up?

PPS. Saved the worst for last: Starting next issue, *Punk Planet*'s going to cost another dollar. It was either that or fold up shop. Damn.

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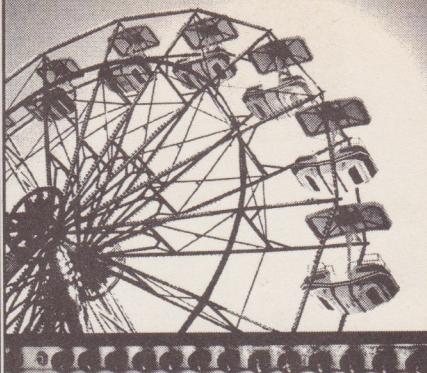
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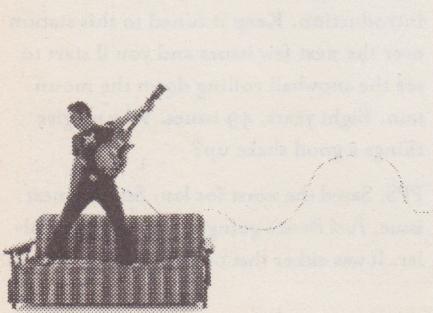
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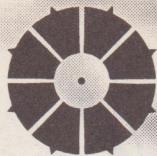
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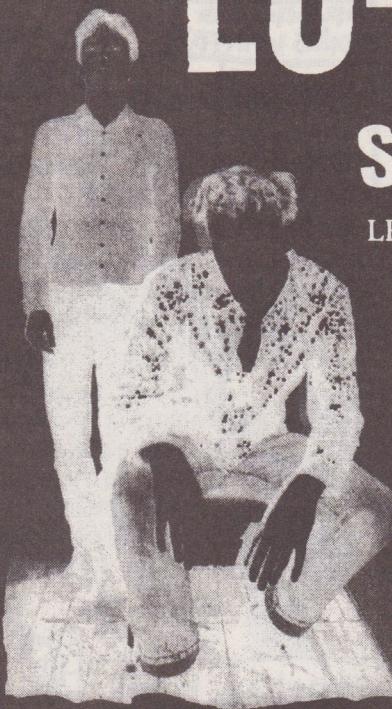
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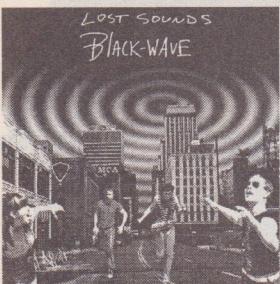
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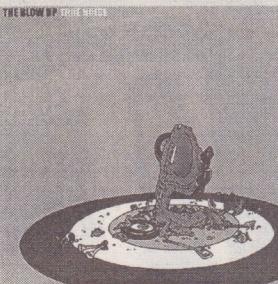
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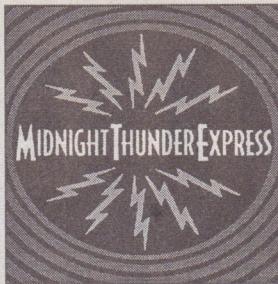
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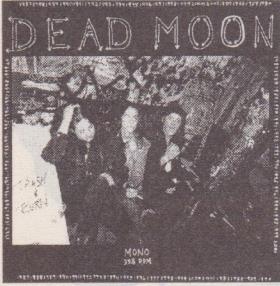
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# mail49

## ► Fox News, Punk Planet, and the war on terrorism.

Hi—

My name is Jon and I'm writing to tell you about how *Punk Planet* has opened my eyes and made me look at things a little differently. I work for the Fox News Channel in New York City. Their slogan is "the network America trusts for fair and balanced news."

I never thought anything of it until I picked up the latest *Punk Planet* and I read the article with ten different things about the war that you might not have known, or whatever the title was ["War Songs", PP47]. After reading it, I turned on my TV and I started watching what the anchors at my work were saying and how what they were saying was totally one-sided and it really was not fair and balanced at all.

I guess all I'm trying to say is that I'm sure that there are a lot of alternative news sources out there, but being a kid that listens to indie rock, I get my alternative news from *Punk Planet*. You guys put out a great, informative magazine and I look forward to every new issue that comes out.

Keep up the good work,  
Jon K

## ► Those pesky columnists offering dissenting views of the dissenting views.

Dear Planeteers:

The decayed walls of rationality Larry Livermore rushes to guard in his latest column [columns, PP47] conceal putrefying

duplicity. While claiming the attacks of Sept. 11th reveal a depravity, a lack of a "better nature" within the hearts or consciences of the perpetrators, this horrible attempt at dehumanization conversely positions the US and its cronies as somehow possessing "civilized" or "rational" dispositions open to careful moral appeals. This notion of the US is shown corrupt in a casual survey of the US' imperialist history without having to exhume every lynched African-American, every poisoned Native American, every slaughtered Vietnamese villager. In short, the blood of people of color spilled across the globe by white men in power pursuing their "rational" agendas of greed disfigure Livermore's argument faster than napalm.

Livermore, sounding the grotesque echo of Bush's own snarling rhetoric, demands we choose sides and I can hear the old sneer leave his lips: "Love it or leave it" while he writes the attacks were intended solely for the purpose of destroying "us and our way of life." Livermore may be willing to mouth his allegiance to a culture maintained by a white supremacist, militarized, corporate behemoth and find the Sept. 11th attacks a personal affront to his own place in that culture but I decline his inclusive invitation to the video arcade self-importance of "kill or be killed" survival or the default status of "immoral pacifism". The US government has long applied aggressive policies against any threat to the profits of industrialists and speculators in war and incarceration, all the while using its citizens as a human shield, collateral, and raw material simultaneously for its neo-colonial expansionism. We live in this increasingly monstrous

nation-state presently run by people whose hands are still slick with oil and the blood of Central American dissenters and as such we are held hostage by the actions carried out by the government in our name.

Tom Ridge will gladly permit Darren Cahr to fly the US flag as a frail intellectualized differentiation between people and their government while the same flag continues to snap over neo-colonial outposts from Guantanamo Bay to South Korea, a visible symbol shadowing the hard outlines of fighter jets, nuclear missiles, and anti-personnel mines primed to preserve the dominant physical, cultural, economic, and military presence of the US. Ice Cube rapped, "You burn your cross and I'll burn your flag", making clear the inherent relationship between the US and white supremacy and by extension, America's imperial underpinnings.

Cahr, in his own reactionary linguistics, [columns, PP47] borrows succinctly from Bush's speechwriters when he writes, "Can't we see evil anymore?". A frighteningly flat question again relying on a thin binary division of Good and Evil, like the cowboy caricatures riding through a John Wayne film.

I have seen evil and found often a "Made-in-USA." mark embossed along its engorged underbelly. I've walked warily through Laotian jungles fearful of unexploded ordnance deposited by US forces as residual terror against the "uncooperative" indigenous population. I've stood at the edge of mass graves in Cambodia and stared at the bones of people killed by the Khmer Rouge who were supported by covert US funds. I've worked with teenagers who've fled the brutal

military regime of Burma, often with their villages burned and families executed with rounds fired from American-made M-16s.

US corporations and politicians have profited long from exporting death and terror. And we, in turn, have tacitly permitted these transactions of blood for gold. The attacks on September 11th exist outside the framework of angular schematics of market policies and political theory. They have put the global challenge of spiritual fundamentalism in sharp relief against capitalist dogmatism. Those who perished in the attacks of Sept. 11th died at the precise intersection of two versions of evil. As always, the innocent became the battlefields for those struggling for dominance. And now Afghani civilians are having a heavy tax of life exacted from them in turn.

The simplistic opinions fielded by Livermore and Cahr disappoint me with their rigid constructions and flimsy accusations of explicit evil rendered tangible in a few Islamic fundamentalists. They undo themselves with gun-toting and flag-waving while unnumbered Muslim men are now held in indefinite detention by the INS and our civil liberties are slowly but gleefully being suspended by the federal government. I'll continue to resist this government and its "new" war while honoring the dead by fighting for the living.

Finally, Planeteers, thank you for the varied and thoughtful array of positions expressed in "War Songs" [PP47]. Much respect due.

Uprise.  
Dwayne

## ► Ten questions guaranteed never to be asked to President Bush.

Dear Editor,

If the following 10 questions were asked of President Bush II during one of his incredibly infrequent press conferences, a great deal of light would likely flow forth and the real reasons for the current domestic and international conflict would become clear:

1. How many thousands of innocent civilians have been killed in American bombing raids, and how many more will be killed in Afghanistan—and elsewhere (sooner rather than later)?

2. Is Mr. Bush worried that his carpet bombing of Afghanistan may have contributed to the dramatic rise in tensions in South Asia, making the likelihood of a conflagration between nuclear rivals India and Pakistan a very real possibility?

3. Is it not true that the preferred path for the proposed UnoCal natural gas pipeline from landlocked Turkmenistan is through Afghanistan, into Pakistan (with a possible Indian extension)?

4. Why, nine days after the installation of the "new and improved" Afghan regime, did Bush select a top UnoCal adviser as US special envoy to Afghanistan?

5. When Dick Cheney said this so-called "War on Terrorism" would not end in our lifetime, was he serious?

6. Why does the Bush Administration insist on violating the United Nations Charter by creating secret military tri-

bunals for suspects, even when our European allies have stated that they will not extradite anyone to face trial in America under those conditions?

7. Do you find it interesting that the otherwise-obsessed-with-the-drug-war corporate media have paid so little attention to the fact that Afghanistan is the center of world opium production, and that Bush gave \$43 million in American foreign aid to the Taliban government less than a year ago?

8. Do you find it at all alarming that Osama bin Laden is a "former employee" of the CIA (just like Saddam Hussein and Manuel Noriega), in large part a creation of American "intelligence", and that bin Laden's organization (formed during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan) never would have existed without Ronald Reagan and George Bush, Sr. having funneled untold millions of American taxpayer dollars to the accused terrorists in the form of American arms shipments?

9. Is it not true that Osama bin Laden requires regular kidney dialysis treatments in order to survive, and do you find it believable that he could be crawling from cave to cave with sophisticated and clumsy medical equipment in tow?

10. Last but not least, where is Osama bin Laden?

Jacob David  
Eureka, CA

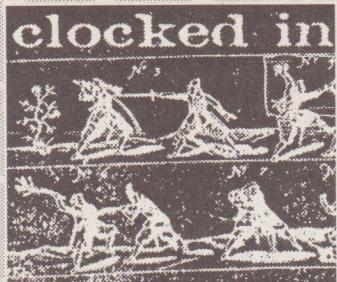
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Agree? Disagree? Got something to say? Drop us a line: Punk Planet attn: letters PO Box 464 Chicago IL, 60690. Or e-mail (with "letter" in your subject line somewhere) to: punkplanet@punkplanet.com



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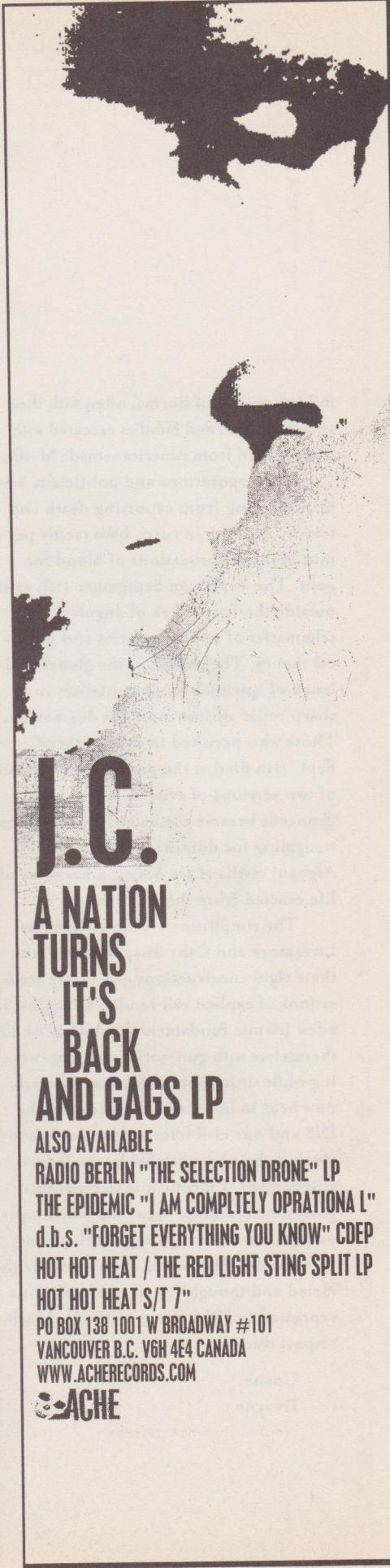
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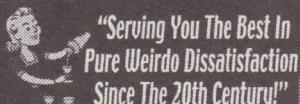
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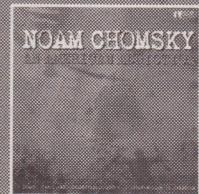
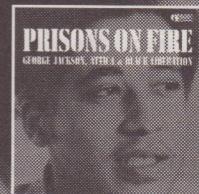


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# columns

# PP49

sam mcpheeters

al burian

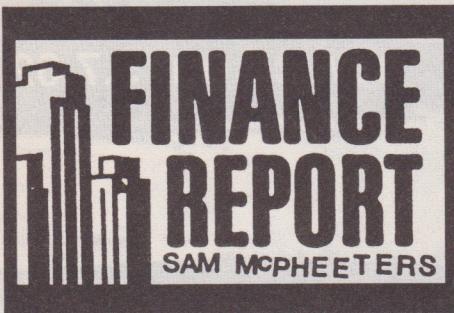
mimi nguyen

darren cahr

joel schalit

kim bae

larry livermore



Pedro, a short hop down the Harbor Freeway from Los Angeles. By the time we'd stopped at a nearby Starbucks, roof done up in that red-tiled, fake Spanish villa look that signifies you could be just about anywhere in southern California, I realized that a quick mental update was coming. We would not be roaming the ancient, vaguely New Englandish cemetery I'd envisioned poor Mr. Boon resting in for the last 16 years. There would be no somber walks under leaning willows, no thoughtful inspections of sloping, long mossed-over tombstones, no polite hushes in the presence of stone columns and faded angels. This would be a modern graveyard, a tidy, sunny, post-WW2 stopgap measure built to accommodate the swelling mass of corpses only a booming major metropolis could rack up. Good for utility, short on atmosphere.

The front fence extended for over a city block and was ringed with dozens of fresh flags (Greens Hills boasts the largest Memorial Day services in the state). We stopped at the main reception building for a map of the grounds. Besides Boon, two other celebrities are buried in the park—Congressional Medal Of Honor recipient Edward Devore, jr. and Charles Bukowski. A polite, punky kid in a crisp suit was working the front desk. I asked him if a lot of people came to visit Bukowski. "Oh yeah," he said, circling our destinations on the map. "Every week." How about Boon? "Hm . . . Not really." That was a small jolt, but not unexpected. Cemeteries' sole function is the preservation of sadness, and this one—despite looming in my own mental mythology since I was a teenager—wasn't going to be any different. We continued up a hill, studying the whereabouts of different plot neighborhoods—"Sunrise Slope", "Memory Lawn", "Vista Grande". I remembered reading that fellow Minuteman Mike

## Closure

I visited the grave of Minutemen guitarist D Boon last month. This is in the Green Hills Memorial Cemetery in San

Watt had once lived across the street from this place. Surveying the landscape beyond the park, it was hard to tell where that would be. A small skyline of industry towered in the distance. Watt moved here as a kid when his father, a Navy man, was transferred from Norfolk, Virginia—the town that San Pedro was starting to remind me of.

Coincidentally, the last time I did this sort of thing was in Norfolk. My friend Bob, the bassist for Maxmillian Colby, died suddenly seven years ago and is buried in neighboring Chesapeake. I won't get into any of the details of that week of horror in July '95, but it's fair to say that several layers of drama during his service and burial had erased any memory of the cemetery itself. Three years later, the last weekend I lived in Richmond, I decided to rent a car and make a private pilgrimage to Bob's grave an hour away. But where was it? I made inquiries to confirm which Norfolk-region graveyard I needed to find. Several calls later, I felt a sudden catch in my throat when the lady on the other end of the line checked her computer and said "Yeah, he's here." Bob was a genuinely great guy, gentle and funny. But death reduces all great, gentle, funny people to abstractions—entities forever fixed at their age of departure. To hear that he "was" somewhere, waiting for a visit, offered the creepiest kind of theological brain disconnect.

I bought some flowers and rented the car. The whole solitary trip was taken in the spirit of trying on a new experience of adulthood, the same sort of self-improvement unease that I once felt going to jury duty (or stopping in for a mortifying eight minutes at a New Orleans strip club). Part of the appeal was just the act of driving alone to an unknown city, stopping for lunch at a Yorktown Stucky's, catching the Ollie North show on the unfamiliar car radio. Maybe this sounds selfish, but graveyards exist for the visitor, not the visiter. Whatever concepts I held of "paying respects" were mine, by their very nature the most private of concepts, faithful to a specific memory that my specific brain still keeps alive. Which doesn't entirely explain why I was so enraged at seeing the stern "No Flowers On The Graves" sign that greeted mourners. By the time I'd found my friend, I was filled with a

has shifted to the negative, although, as I have said, I never  
let it come inside me like in that vision I had in summer under  
the sunburned sky. I believe my last name is synonymous with  
silence and the like physical disorder because  
you'll understand, I suppose, that I, alone, possess no  
real goals now; no older sibling, no career, nor the organized whimsies  
of my own mind; now god will teach him to "work" and  
nothing will be required but to stand, all hours until I die.  
The only one, you're dead now, you can't work, so that's more than  
just about anything else. I removed him from it fully myself,  
I understand another to mean you'd thought you made a mistake  
and you and everyone around you thought he'd been born  
but he was just bad and it's easier to remove him from the  
advice of your mother too. But I'm still doing what I can, and such  
strange mixture of sorrow and bureaucratic rage, ready to fistfight  
the first work crew that came lumbering by on a backhoe, off to dig  
a fresh plot somewhere, untroubled by my petty, confused drama.

Was this *closure*? I'd always prided myself on avoiding that  
brand of sappiness. It's not just the sinister political overtones of  
the word that bother me. These overtones, for example, were  
brought to their absurd conclusion just last month, at the other  
end of Virginia, by the parents of slain CIA officer Michael  
Spann, who popped by the trial of "American Taliban" John  
Walker Lindh to lobby for Lindh's conviction and death sentence  
on the grounds that it would provide them a morsel of *closure* in  
the unrelated death of their spy son. No, my beef with the buzz-  
word lays more in its infuriating simplicity, the idea that it is  
somehow healthy for people to have a deadline for their grief. I've  
lost pets I'll never recover from. Why is it, when a human is sud-  
denly sucked out of our lives, other humans take it upon them-  
selves to pressure the bereaved to "make peace" with their loss?  
It's infantilizing. And yet . . . there I was, blubbering over the  
grave of a lost friend; my last official act in the state of Virginia.  
Maybe I'd been lured by the narcotic of closure after all.

At least Green Hills' flower rules were a bit more humane.  
Small signs here and there remind visitors of the weekly bouquet  
pickup schedule, designed to keep mounds of rotting vegetation  
out of sight. I had been right about the very Californianess of this  
cemetery. Everything was spruce and modern. There were no  
tombstones, only plaques kept flush with the neatly trimmed lawn.  
It was hard to read names of the deceased until directly over the  
grave in question. More recent plots featured photos etched  
directly into marble, using some new technical process that looks  
as alien as the photographic ice cream cakes one can now buy at  
Baskin-Robbins (and these pictures, frequently of beaming 19 year  
olds holding malt liquors aloft like the liberty torch, made me  
wonder yet again—why do surviving parents insist on picking the  
tackiest photos for their slain child's public memorial?). It took us  
a while, wandering the sunny vastness of the Ocean View lot, to  
find Charles Bukowski. I've never read any of his books, so there  
was no risk of closure here. We might as well have been visiting the

grave of a civil war general. I was content to see none of the idiotic  
fan graffiti that mars HP Lovecraft's marker in Providence.  
Someone had left a fresh carnation and a few cigarette stubs and a  
bottlecap from an obscure Mexican beer. Nearby, several families  
were picnicking on various plots, lost in their own scenarios.

I read in an interview once that Mike Watt had visited this  
very grave but had resisted ever stopping by the site of Boon. Too  
hard, said he, even after all these years. He seemed far more hon-  
est about his inconsolable grief than any interviewer deserved.  
I've always admired this public resistance to "closure." Having had  
strangers at shows approach me with intimate knowledge of my  
own personal sphere, I can appreciate the rough intrusions Mr.  
Watt must have encountered. But I can't even begin to imagine  
the amount of boors that have approached the man in the last  
decade and a half, all familiar with the enormity of his loss, all  
offering unsolicited advice on how to "get over it."

We continued on to the Lake View Lawn neighborhood of  
this tidy necropolis. Greens Hills is a huge cemetery (75,000  
customers and counting), but it all kinda looks the same. It took  
us a while to find D. Boon's grave. We eventually did. It seems  
like it would be a violation of Boon's privacy—privacy that exists at  
least as a concept in my still-living mind—to list what his plaque  
reads. But I will say that the epitaph is brief, tasteful and entirely  
heartbreaking. Across the way, a heart shaped balloon with a smi-  
ley face bobbed insanely from the Valley Of Peace, some new  
arrival. We left a lot quieter than we'd arrived. Later, online, I  
found a picture of D Boon from Halloween '85, two months  
before his death. In the picture he is smiling, forever dressed as  
"Beast Man" in trash bags and unrecognizable junk. Again, a dis-  
connect; the picture stirred some emotions not quite definable. I  
never knew the guy and I'm not sure what rights I have to still  
mourn his loss. Even later, reading over the Green Hills website,  
wondering aloud why a cemetery would even *have* a website, I dis-  
covered the option of purchasing a bouquet with a credit card and  
having a staff member place the flowers on the grave of one's  
choice. Yet another disconnect; I could have paid my respects  
without ever leaving the house.

## Corrections Department

I feel pretty dumb now for having called Kenneth Lay and Jeffrey Skilling "those two ponytailed buttholes behind energy-broker Enron" in *Punk Planet 41*. Lay clearly has no ponytail. More importantly, I shouldn't have even hinted at passing myself off as someone with the remotest clue as to what that company did for money. I don't. They might as well have been in the inter-dimensional mustache trade for all I comprehend. Last week, the March issue of *Business 2.0*—a useless New Economy rag whose mail department has cruelly decided not to honor the expiration date of my free subscription—arrived with Mr. Lay on its cover. The caption reads *Liar!* in some fancy typeface, and the man's nose has been painstakingly Photoshopped by an extra five inches. This Pinocchio bit is a common fallback in the business magazine world, the same type of intellectual slack-ass bullshit that has music magazines running "Take A Walk On The Wild Side" as their article header when they can't come up with anything else. It is, one would hope, a fireable offense within the graphic design world.

But the magazine remains on my desk. I'm fascinated with this picture. Someone took the time to render the nose job as realistically as possible. It is far more brutal than Steve Martin's schnozzle in *Roxanne*. Every pore and indentation and blemish has been added to this erect little face sausage. The faint cleft on the tip of Mr. Lay's real snout is faithfully retained. I don't think I need to insult this publication's readers by mentioning what this resembles. It's one of the most obscene things I've ever seen. The caption could just as easily read "Lock Up Your Daughters!" If someone from the 1950s saw this magazine, they would drop dead on the sidewalk from shock, shame, moral aneurysm. What the fuck is happening to this civilization?



### 1. Opiate of the masses

Tucson, AZ: "The Lord knows I'm sinnin' and sinnin' ain't right," sings a contemporary country crooner on the

radio, "But me and the good Lord are gonna have a good talk later tonight." A knee-jerk jab of the search button away, the mainstream alternative station offers the latest less-than-totally empathetic rock anthem by Weezer: "you've got your problems/ I've got my hash pipe." And that pretty much summarizes the religious versus secular approaches to coping with life, problem solving through prayer versus problem solving through paraphernalia.

I've lost my keys and wallet. Having exhausted the two or three places I might possibly imagine they could be, I'm left with little recourse but to pray to some form of higher being for their

return. I do this sometimes. Despite whatever set of beliefs and value systems I claim, I notice that I'm only an atheist when I'm being rational; as soon as I get panicked I consult oracles and accept whatever theology will get me results.

In late spring 2000, I left my backpack, containing all my earthly belongings of any value, on a picnic table at a rest stop in southern Germany. I noticed that the bag was missing two hours later. There seemed no chance of the backpack still being at the rest stop, but we drove the two hours back anyway, on the off chance that it might still be around. With nothing to do but obsess about my backpack during hours of tedious backtracking, I got desperate: I decided to attempt to accept religion into my life. My personal version of prayer is less hail-Mary oriented and more like haggling with some celestial used-car salesman over the price of a dented Volvo station wagon, with my opening invocation to the Lord usually along the lines of, "Alright, dude, it's me. Let's work out some kind of deal here." As I recall, the bargain brokered in this instance was that, in exchange for safe return of backpack, plane ticket, passport and traveler's checks, I'd cease all sinning in the traditional, old fashioned sense: I'd quit drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana and having physical relations with people whom I had little or no intention of marrying. Come on, big dude, I prayed, just hook me up with this one little thing and I'm a believer.

It seemed a fair deal, and apparently the Lord accepted my terms, because when I finally arrived at the rest stop, there was my bag, untouched and all items intact. It was a sign from heaven, and I knew what I now had to do to repay my debt.

"It's a miracle that your bag is here," one of my traveling companions said.

"Miracle?" I scoffed, "Man, I just got lucky this time."

That's the beauty of moral relativism. Backpack and all contents safely retrieved, I was an atheist again within minutes and reneging on my end of the deal within hours. The moment of crisis had passed and with it the need for help from a higher power—now that I had my stuff back I could accept the world as chaos and randomness again, shouting belligerent drunken toasts to Charles Darwin on the dance-floor as I lived it up in existentialist party mode.

So now, in Tucson, it seems clear that if there is a God, he's probably mad about the whole backpack situation, my failing to live up to my end of the deal and all, and he's decided to punish me by hiding my keys. An unfortunate turn of events in my spiritual life! Again, panic leads to the involuntary reaction, and I find myself hitting speed-dial on the hotline to Valhalla, muttering under my breath, "Alright, Dog. It's me again. You there? OK, listen, we've gotta talk about this whole wallet thing." My prayers ring hollow this time, though—I've already lost spiritual cred with the backpack fiasco, and I can't imagine I'm going to be able to work out similar terms for this whole key/wallet deal. You can only pull the "give me back my stuff and I'll believe in you" routine on the Almighty once; he doesn't fall for it the second

time. No, I fear that my negotiation leverage is pretty low at this point. If I were God and I wanted li'l Bur to cease imbibing and cavorting, I'd certainly teach him a lesson in the form of a lost wallet and keys. Just as backpack retrieval equaled yes on the existence of New Testament yoga-instructor nice God, it seems clear that the deal in this case is that no keys and wallet = Old Testament vengeful God.

During moments of panic about the whereabouts of ones possessions it becomes impossible to believe there is not a higher schema in place governing your Job-like sufferings; it doesn't seem possible that your misfortunes could be a result solely of your own ineptitudes. No, there must be higher, persecuting forces at work. I have angered Jehovah and he has confiscated my sub club cards and my van keys. I do not hold out hope of seeing these items again. Why me, Lord, why me? Aren't there more deserving fornicators and debauchers in this world who ought to be misplacing their car keys right at this moment? Why have I been singled out for the plague of locusts?

"Hey, is this your stuff?" says Tim, producing my keys and wallet from a bag where, the night before, I had stashed them and promptly forgotten all about it. "I was looking for duct tape and found this in here."

Hmmmm. Key and wallet retrieval. What does that mean? These signs from heaven are too hard to decipher. The early American puritans believed that you had to get a special invitation signal from heaven in order to gain entry in the afterlife, something like a rabid squirrel on your front lawn or a neat configuration of birds flying overhead. But modernity is an infinitely complex web of potential symbols and signs when you start looking for them, all conflicting and contradictory. Duct tape? The puritans never had to factor in such things to their theological paradigms. I can find no way to order the signs and signals, to make any sense of it all or derive personal direction. I can't even flip coins; they fly out of my hand, invariably, and into the nearest storm drain.

## 2. Masses of opiates

Later that day, I'm transfixed by the tube in Tucson, watching CNN coverage of Mexican border drug busts (I believe it's CNN, although for all I know it may be some new reality "all drug busts all the time" programming channel). The War on Drugs is back in the news headlines suddenly, the '80s unfolding once again, except with "terror" as the ism replacing communes as the evil being funded by drugs. This sudden resurgence of drug war propaganda, an '80s retro-revivalist comeback the likes of which Mariah Carey could only dream of, disturbs me on a number of levels. On an abstract level, it just seems impossibly tedious that history would so blatantly repeat itself, with our new Ronald W. McReagan III as president in charge—once as tragedy, once as farce, in Karl Marx's famous formulation, but in this as in so many things Marx couldn't predict the advent of television reruns, and the population's subsequent willingness to accept historical repeats dozens of times.

In any case, bad news on a global political level, but also bad news for me on a more concrete and personal level, as everyone else in the room is ignoring CNN and huddling around a Rand-McNally road atlas, planning out the logistics of a pharmaceuticals-smuggling road trip down to Mexico.

Before leaving town on the drug run, I consult my friend Bill Tsitsos on spirituality issues. Tsitsos can relate to my panicked lapses into atheism, and admits, "I've just had to concede, lately, that I do believe in God, because I was having so many of those panicked lapses that to call myself an atheist would make me a total hypocrite. That's the irony of post-Enlightenment thinking," philosophizes Bill. "We have the scientific-rational power to overcome our reliance on God, but not to fill the void left by removing our reliance on God."

I would not consider myself an expert on the Enlightenment, but I believe that as a world-historical development it generally gets favorable reviews. Bill Tsitsos, however, is—as usual—on the contemporary cultural cutting edge with his retro revivalism: 2002 is totally '80s revisited, from the synthesizer sounds of Aha-influenced indie-rock to the renewed presence of DEA helicopters. The rejection of enlightenment thinking in favor of tribal religious war is also pure '80s, although the mutually agreed upon Al Queda/Bush administration program for global politics in the twenty-first century seems to foreshadow a return to less the 1980's and more the 880's. Despite rhetorical attempts at downplaying it, George W's self-proclaimed (and quickly retracted) "crusade" has the same dogmatic fundamentalist undertones of every great religious extermination in history.

Religion makes no sense; it's illogical and irrational and only speaks to panicked, unenlightened people who can't locate their keys. Politically, the atheist stance seems the only defensible one, and the only one which seems like it contains within it any hope of human survival, of transcending mutually assured total genocide, but how do I reconcile this with the fact that God hooked me up with my backpack in Bavaria? That prayer did appear to work. And further complicating matters, if I accept the Tsitsos "I pray therefore I believe" argument, and choose to process as fact the idea that God revealed to me his desire that I cease my self-indulgent ways via an act of miraculous luggage retrieval, how then should I imagine the higher powers are taking my espoused political-atheist party-all-the-time program? Having received the signs from up above, is it strategically advisable to align myself with the other team?

Wandering the seedy streets of Nogales, Mexico, a few hours later, I think about the TV footage of spy helicopters X-raying pick up trucks, or the man caught with a pound of cocaine sewn into the skin of his leg. I do not understand the exact mechanics of the North American Free Trade Agreement, but personally, I'd rather accept Mexico's cocaine than their environmental standards. And it seems like if we are going to impinge on unfettered commerce in this fashion, and even devote television channels to the practice, the Mexican government should demand that the

CEO's responsible for the transportation of toxic waste from the US to Mexico carry it over the pedestrian bridge personally, sewn into flaps gouged out of their inner thighs.

The streets of Nogales are crowded with pharmacies, advertising 50 percent off anti-depressants and prescription-free viagra. We enter one such establishment, looking to purchase a piñata filled with valium, prozac and other tour necessities. When we walk in the door the pharmacists smiles brightly. "Hello!" he says. "Hippies?"

"No," we mutter.

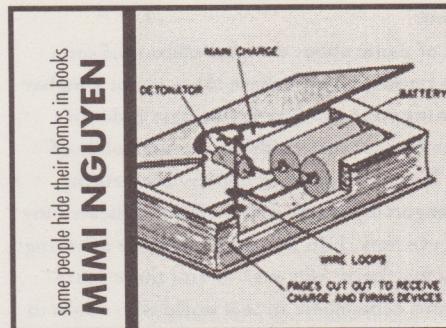
"Punks?" He guesses again.

"Punks," Tim affirms.

Punks: with piñatas full of pills, the party program of the post-enlightenment dark ages, where the dollar is the state religion and pharmaceuticals are the manifestation of miracle, the synthetic spiritual solvent which fills the void left by a world based on rationality and calculation. This is the void which Bill feels and has to concede God in the face of; the void which drove George W. Bush to his first career as an alcoholic drifter before he was born again as a fundamentalist Christian. Even our religious wars recognize the implicit parallel and quickly become drug wars, with anti-drug rhetoric adopting all the implicit race and class hostilities religious rhetoric is traditionally in charge of pushing. This is the war we're in now: the empty future versus the bloody past, the scientists who say God is a pill versus the zealots who say God demands that we kill. In the end, medieval minds like George Bush's will prove atavistic, even by free-market capitalism-ascendant standards. Religion is an irrational force, a flux in the mechanics of the market, which is too inefficient to be abided. As long as fundamentalists want to blow up abortion clinics or crash planes into trade centers, the dissemination of colas and plastic trinkets is impeded. But will humanity really ever fully accept plastic trinkets in the place of spirituality? Who can pick a side in the Jihad vs. McWorld-war? And how long before the war on foreign ideology and belief trickles down to us here on ground level, how long before the war on terror equals the war on drugs and that equals renewed police intervention, once again, in the lives of ordinary US citizens?

Answer: about three hours. Piñatas full of pills safely stowed in the back seat, we are cruising through Texas when the cops stop us at a random drug check-point. Prayer, again, crosses my mind as an option. But what deity to address? Who's team is God actually on? Ours? Theirs? Mine? Not mine, that's for sure. The missing wallet, I realize, was just an appetizer for the real wrath to come. The wages of sin is death. At the very least, long-term incarceration. Drug-detecting dogs are barking and scratching at the doors of the van as the officer explains that he's on to us and we should just hand over the drugs and everything will be cool. "But if we have to search your van, you're all going to be in a lot of trouble," he explains. Oh, you don't know the half of it, officer. A sacrificial offering is required to the higher powers: I produce my remaining minuscule stash of crinkly Chicago marijuana

and hand it over. "That's it?" the cop says, disappointed, holding the pitiful scrap of weed in his hand. He waves us off, aggravated, and we leave post-haste, the cop watching us in the rearview, shaking his head. Clearly he had been expecting a bigger bust, having mistaken us, I can only imagine, for hippies.



MIMI NGUYEN  
some people hide their bombs in books

*Ghost World* opens with a slow pan across buildings and into apartment windows, where an Asian immigrant woman leans out her window,

smoking a cigarette, or a white family sits on the battered couch while a boy toddler, ignored, beats at a stuffed animal with a plastic bat. Each condensed vignette suggests a separate domestic universe, all organized around the blue glow and endless chatter of the television set (the only omnipresent prop, which is not seen directly until the camera arrives in Enid's room) but in subtly different ways. As English tutorial, perhaps, or reliable companion to the awkward and lonely, the television activates a whole range of social relations in the private spaces of the home. I like that. Even if television is a household fixture, it doesn't also mean that its function is necessarily fixed.

Because I think I may be a voyeur in this sense—because I want to know what things (like television sets or pop stars or national anthems) mean to people and for what reasons—I entered into my graduate studies five years ago.

Now I find myself nearing the end of this process. One afternoon Mark finds the stash of pens and pencils the cat has been hoarding in the bedroom closet, and so I have twenty recovered Pilot Precise blue pens to aid me in my slow sifting through journals, essays, and books, slouching my way toward the dissertation.

I am in the middle of matching citations to bibliographies in articles for anthologies. I've lost the cite for a particular quote about maps of desire and displacement somewhere between multiple incarnations and mysterious, missing disks—all I know is *Public Culture*, page seven. Tomorrow, the anthropology library and its stacks for me, and would someone please give me the haircut I've been longing for? A boy's cut, with bangs still long enough to brush my eyebrows. I fantasize about this cut while building a methodological framework, or paging through the bound volumes of academic journals.

Wedged into a tight corner of a side street cafe, R. tells me horror stories about a scholarly Marxism conference she attended this last spring. Several panels were disrupted by a band of orthodox Marxists apparently "protecting" the true spirit of revolution in red berets and black combat boots. (When she describes their

collective costume, I ask all incredulous, "Um, are you sure they're not a performance group? You know, doing a 'happening'?" This group regularly accuses all stripes of Marxist and post-Marxist scholars of "mysticism" and "idealism" and other materialist-philosophical cusswords. At the conference they wanted to know what each paper would do to further the revolution, and denounced all posts-as bourgeois: poststructuralism, postmodernism, postcolonialism, post-Marxism.

After giving her paper on political despair in 20th century German philosophy, R. was told that when the time came to draw the line in the sand, R. would be on the other side, an enemy.

R. puts her hands (and organic burrito) up as I roll my head in my hands, laughing. "And they accused me of mysticism? What else are they doing but mystifying 'the proletariat' and 'the revolution'? They act like it's still 1910, not 2001, and they're the vanguard. I mean, they think David Harvey is a sell-out because he tried to make Marxist theory relevant to the present context. But isn't that what a historical materialist is supposed to do?"

Later I have office hours at the cafe across the street from the anthropology building, crammed behind a round table on a bench outside while students worry about their first papers, show me rough drafts and ask for resources. The course requires a semester-long project examining a particular commodity and its production, distribution, and consumption in circuits of financial and symbolic capital. I reassure them that yes, tanning beds, garters, Britney Spears, dildos, microwave ovens, bathroom scales, and Gillette women's razors are all legitimately fascinating subjects, and I think I might have discussed at *too much* length about each of these to illustrate my point.

Finally L. shuffles the papers in front of her after the others had left and says, "Yeah, I'm also writing my women's studies thesis this semester, but I can't find a second reader. I want to write about herbal abortion but I'm not sure what aspect of it to write about, and I don't know anyone who can help me. Do you?" I startle the elderly man cowering behind the next table as I exclaim, "Oh my god! I can totally help you! I was a women's health activist for years," and proceed to produce a flurry of interrogative questions about historical practices and discursive effects. My office hours end with a promise to give L. a chance to rummage through my archive.

These are the details—the shared conversations about the intellectual pursuit and its political stakes, the tangles of inquiry and insight (or its nearness) and the everyday epiphanies—that make it worth my while.

I come home several hours later to a series of looming deadlines for anthologies, conferences, grants and magazines. I have two weeks to revise two essays for two different anthologies before the manuscripts are sent to the presses' readers. Since November I've had to present on the production of the refugee subject, queer subcultures, popular culture and riot grrrl, "third wave" feminism, representational politics and the future of Asian American studies, for two guest lectures, one MIT symposium,

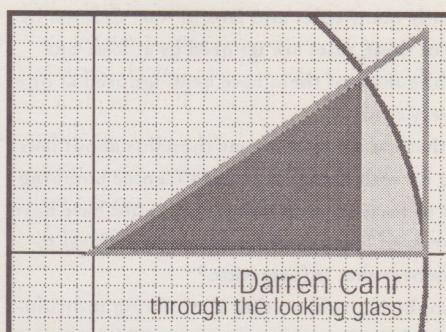
one alumni dinner and two conferences. Of course, I'm also supposed to be writing my dissertation, printing the *Race Riot* compilation, and editing two academic anthologies on race and sexuality and Asian American cultural studies.

I'd like to think that all this isn't necessary, that I don't need the push and pull of deadlines, pressures. I pretend as if I'm not working on a schedule, as if it weren't true that I need to do such things as "budget" my time or "manage" my priorities. And I worry sometimes that I love my work too much, so many bits and pieces of me sent out into the world, and that if I didn't have all this, I would be lost, or longing.

• • •

Wonderful new zines I've read: Yumi's *External Text*, Wendy's new issue of *Subject to Change*, Bianca and Alejandro's split zine *Mala / Insurgent*. Ask me for more information, or get on the Internet, dude.

Reach me as usual at Mimi Nguyen, POB 11906, Berkeley, CA 94712, or slander13@mindspring.com.



### Various Thoughts

I. I am not a fan of Mariah Carey.

I know, you're shocked.

Surprised even.

But I'm not, and

never have been. However, I am quite proud of what she has just accomplished: She has single handedly done more damage to the music industry than any street-cred indie-rock type could ever have hoped to do on their own.

For those of you not paying attention to the machinations of high-octave, pseudo-soul divas with anger management issues, Ms. Carey received an \$80-some million, four record deal from her record company two years ago. She received \$21 million up front as an advance. Her first album as part of the deal, "Glitter," failed miserably. The record label, realizing its error (and wishing to avoid being stuck with \$60 odd million more in payments that it might never make back) gave Ms. Carey an additional \$28 million to go away and end the contract. That's right: for delivering one album so bad that even died-in-the-wool Mariah Carey fans wouldn't buy it, Mariah Carey received a total of \$49 million.

Ha.

Record labels are suddenly faced with the reality that superstar acts (whether Mariah Carey or REM) fade quickly in a world suffused with MP3s. Why spend your money on a superstar when for nothing you can download great music from thousands of acts in every genre. You can support them when they put out their own album on their own label. Even major

stars like Don Henley are trying to lobby the California legislature to end long-term recording contracts which lock young bands (that may not know any better) into long-term indentured servitude if not outright artistic slavery. The record industry is under full attack from technology; from its own artists; and from consumers who are increasingly unwilling to pay higher prices for CDs when the actual cost of making a CD is actually less than it was a decade ago.

Again, I say: Ha.

## 2. The "laws of war."

I guess that I had never given much thought to the laws of war before our current imbroglio in Afghanistan. I had always imagined that wars were fairly disorganized affairs. Usually neither side is particularly nice to the other side, and in general attempt to kill/maim each other until one side gives up. That, I thought, was the idea.

Clearly, I was mistaken.

There are apparently many rules and laws of war, defined by various treaties. Many of these rules are ignored by at least one side in any conflict, while most of them have been ignored at one point or another in every conflict.

I guess the thing that has spurred on my thoughts about laws and rules of war has to do with the World Trade Center bombing itself, and the concept of torture. If the bombing could have been avoided, saving thousands of lives, would it have been ethical to torture someone to discover that information?

This is the philosophical problem that all thinking individuals need to face: is it worth undermining the right of the individual in order to protect (or improve the lot of) the many? Are the individual's "rights" more important than the "greater good of the many." This is not a right/left issue—there are people on either side of this on the left and the right. This is, instead, the battle between Utilitarians and Entitlement theorists.

Your eyes glaze over, I see. Well, in actuality this is just about the most important thing that you or anyone else can decide about yourself. Do I believe in rights, or utility? This is the basis point for any belief system that you might establish for yourself. If you don't have a point of view on this argument, then you really don't care about your society, your culture, or yourself.

Utilitarians (led on the left by Peter Singer, the animal rights crusader, and on the right by Richard Posner, the Federal appeals court judge) believe that the most important thing is to try to craft rules for our society that maximize the welfare of the greatest number of people (or, in the case of Singer, the greatest number of living beings as well). In other words, we should try to order our society such that the greatest number of people are happiest with their lot. Obviously, Singer and Posner have very different views about what justifies "happiness" or even "utility." Singer believes that utilitarianism justifies the redistribution of wealth,

while Posner believes that it justifies a fairly unfettered version of capitalism. Regardless, though, of how they believe the goal should be reached, they are united in believing that maximizing utility for the maximum number of people is the right thing to do. A utilitarian has no problem with the notion of harming one individual to save many individuals, and while I hesitate to put words into their mouths, I doubt that either Singer or Posner would object too much to the idea of harming one person to save thousands of others.

Entitlement theorists believe in rights that trump utility. People have the right to be a part of society, or not a part of society, or form their own society, and should be subjected to only the minimum amount of coercion necessary to create a minimal state structure—some taxes to pay for firemen, for example—and that's it. Some (true anarchists) would say that even fire protection should only be voluntary, and that any services should only be provided with the consent of the governed. Each individual is their own king or queen in the most extreme version of this kind of thinking. First Amendment absolutists at the ACLU often fall into this camp, to a lesser extent, as do right-wing libertarians. They would argue that very few (if any) greater goods can ever justify damaging a man or woman's native right to self-determination.

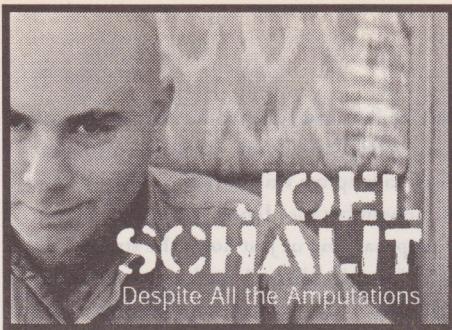
So what am I? I guess that I would be a utilitarian if I actually trusted anyone to fairly judge the "utility" of any activity. How can anyone determine what is best for everyone? Every attempt at "scientific" social engineering has been a failure, for a simple reason: societies are organic, ever changing things that cannot be engineered from above.

That said, I'm not nearly as extreme as I once was (ANARCHY!!!!) in my belief that every man and woman should have the right to be left alone. I think that there are some compromises that we must make in order to survive (while pure philosophy is great, you can't eat it). Thus, I strongly believe in rights, and I'm suspicious of government intrusion into anything but the most basic things, but I'm not prepared to go all the way.

So what do I think about torturing people to save thousands? I think that it's a terrible idea because there's never any way to know that this one instance of torture will save anyone, because the interrogator will never know what this person really knows—they may in fact be making things up simply to end the torture (in fact, torture is a deeply unreliable interrogation technique—check out the Spanish Inquisition for some prime examples of the "confessions" obtained by Torquemada). People's rights are not infinite, as I once believed, but they are the building blocks of our culture, and dismissing them out of some utilitarian urge is a serious mistake, in my mind.

However, I am in favor of using Mariah Carey's songs during the interrogation of particularly loathsome suspects—even if I do suspect that it might be a violation of basic human dignity.

I don't know—what do you think?



ry fort at Qala-e-Jhangi, I was approaching the tollbooths for the Bay Bridge, on the way home from shopping at Ikea.

Idling my truck while waiting my turn in line, I found myself staring at a US Navy vessel moored at a pier in Oakland. From what I could discern, the huge, charcoal grey freighter looked like a fleet supply ship. While such a sight is by no means unusual from this part of the highway, it made me curious to check the news and see what was happening in Afghanistan.

Looking at my watch, I noticed that it was just about time for the evening broadcast of the BBC News on the San Francisco School District's alternative public radio station, KALW. Turning on the radio, I could hear the warm and five reassuring electronic beeps of *Newshour*. Soon enough, I received my up to the minute fix of military intelligence.

The announcer began the show with the news that a CIA officer was rumored to have been killed in an uprising by a several hundred Taliban prisoners, whom the BBC reported had overpowered their lightly armed guards and begun looting the fort's armory for grenade launchers and assault rifles. (Later reports allege that many of the prisoners had been improperly searched, and were concealing weapons underneath their clothing.) Journalists, Red Cross officials and Northern Alliance soldiers were apparently sliding down the walls of the mud fortress in order to escape, while Special Forces troops were calling in air strikes from fighter-bombers, assault helicopters, and, it was rumored, B-52 Stratofortresses.

"This looks to be the most brutal, violent moment of the war so far," said one of the reporters covering the story. "It's turning into an absolutely suicidal fight to the death, a total bloodbath." Transfixed by the horrific story unfolding on my radio, I'd forgotten to continue lurching forward in line towards the tollbooth. All of the sudden, the spell that the narrative was casting upon me was broken by the sound of cars honking behind me, and trucks circling around me to pay their fees and continue on with their trip across the bay. "Shit," I thought. "This is just too depressing. I better turn the radio off so I can get home without causing an accident."

After finally paying my fee to a laughing toll booth attendant who recognized me as the spaced-out driver, I slowly made my way through the traffic, and got on the bridge. For just that one minute, I thought, the war had sucked me up into its own media vortex and nearly caused time to stop as its almost unfathomable violence carried me away in the details of its blood-letting frenzy. As my pickup passed through the tunnel in Treasure Island, I noticed that the traffic had somewhat subsided, and that it was

The night the first reports started to filter out about the violent uprising of Taliban prisoners being held at the 19th century

safe to turn on the radio again.

Tuning into an unidentifiable generic classic rock station, I could hear the opening chords of The Byrds' legendary period piece, "Eight Miles High." The guitars jangled and jammed, the bass guitar thudded like it was coming out of some dark tunnel. I remembered the first time I played the song for a friend in college, he remarked "God, it sounds an awful light like Television." I recalled laughing really hard, and telling him that it actually worked the other way around—that Television were very much influenced by The Byrds.

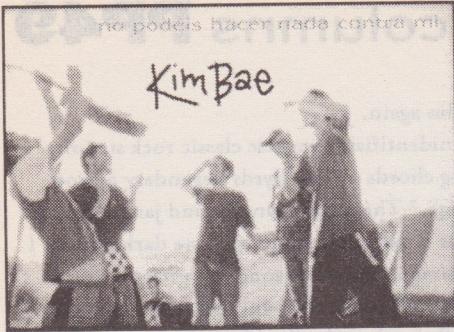
This pleasant memory soon faded, as Roger McGuinn's deceptively sad, impressionistic account of flying to London to go on a UK tour recast itself in my mind as the story of an alienated B-52 pilot returning home from a high-altitude raid over North Vietnam. Recalling all of the media hype surrounding the Clearview Channel's banning of songs that touched on 'touchy', post-9/11 themes like flying—Peter, Paul and Mary's "Leaving on a Jetplane," and Neil Diamond's paean to unrestricted immigration, "America," I had to laugh. Out of my own war-borne feelings of impotence, I'd instantly projected my desire for a more enlightened broadcasting culture onto a piece of music whose subtext is really about how great it is to be stoned.

After I got off the bridge, I drove through the Haight, hoping that I could find a place to park so I could purchase a falafel sandwich to take home and eat for dinner. As I slowly made my way up this historic street, filthy hippies congregated in cold clusters in front of stores like the Gap, Skates on Haight and Amoeba Music, panhandling passers by while clutching backpacks and beat up guitars. I looked out at them from the comfort of my heated car, and began remembering the strains of the other version of "Eight Miles High," performed by Husker Du during the mid 1980s.

An innocent purchase of a 7" when I was in 10th grade, this furious, four to the floor rendition of The Byrds' classic was so absolutely manic, I'd spent years thinking that Bob Mould's complete lack of intelligibility meant that it was really a protest song. "Perhaps if I'd heard the original correctly, I may have ended up like these guys," I muttered to myself as a guy with dreadlocks came up to my door as I waited for a parking space and said, "Buds, doses." "No thanks," I replied to him as I began to roll up my window. "That's not the version of the sixties I subscribe to." Angry at my pointlessly condescending reaction to this possibly homeless person, I took a right on Stanyan and drove home, depriving myself of the right to eat for being such an asshole.

Walking through my front door bearing my new purchases from Ikea in hand, I immediately got on the phone with the intention of forgetting my troubles by calling my friend Charlie and asking him whether he ever considered Television to be a political band. But, before I could get my fingers to do the walking, I recalled their old song "Foxhole," and anticipated Charlie saying "What a stupid fucking question Joel."

E-mail me at: colloquial2001@yahoo.com



Two weeks ago my father called me just as I was getting ready for work.

"Something terrible happened to Hee Sun. Can

you come to Chicago as soon as possible?" He wouldn't tell me exactly what happened over the phone so I tried not to let my imagination run wild. The two plus hour drive to Chicago through fog and darkness was pretty hellish. Despite my best efforts, my mind was imagining all sorts of scenarios.

Hee Sun is one of three cousins—the others are Yeong Sun and Alice—who are pretty much a part of my immediate family. We lived in the same town, Battle Creek, Michigan, until I was five. I pretty much grew up with them and even lived with them on a few occasions. I had always sort of looked up to Hee Sun and Yeong Sun, who were both quite a bit older than I. They were both extremely intelligent, worldly, open-minded, funny, and super cool. The kinds of people that had a million friends and that everybody loved to be around. They seemed to have everything going for them. A few years ago, Hee Sun moved to Chicago from Michigan, became a pastry chef at the Four Seasons hotel and seemed to be doing very well for herself.

It wasn't until about six months ago that I found out that Hee Sun and Yeong Sun didn't live the charmed lives I thought they did. About two years ago, Yeong Sun spent time in a hospital in San Francisco, where she lived at the time. Nobody told me why she was there although I made preparations to go visit her. A few days after her hospitalization, I called my father to find out whether or not he was going out to San Francisco. "No. She's fine now." I asked what happened. "Oh, she passed out but she's okay now." I was a little puzzled but wrote it off as lack of communication typical of Korean families. Six months ago I found out that she had attempted suicide. A few months later, my mother and I were talking about it and she asked me if I remembered when Hee Sun and Yeong Sun had come to live with us for a while when I was a kid in Topeka, Kansas. I said that I only vaguely remembered. She told me that they had come because Hee Sun had tried to kill herself, at the age of 13. Both of them had been struggling with depression since they were children. I was completely shocked that the two of them, who I thought of as ultimately confident and self-assured, had such serious problems. I never imagined that anybody in my family suffered from any sort of mental illness. I started to wonder about myself since I was so closely related to Hee Sun and Yeong Sun. I worried about Alice, who is nineteen, 10 years younger than Yeong Sun.

While I was driving to Chicago to find out what happened to Hee Sun, I thought I pretty much already knew what my father would tell me. He told me to go directly to his apartment, not to any hospital. I knew, though only minimally and through second-

hand information, what Hee Sun had suffered for at least the past twenty years. After two and a half long hours, I reached my father's place and he got in my van to help me find parking. A block down, he told me to pull over and wait because Jenny (my sister), Alice, and Sue (my aunt) were approaching us just down the street. I put my van in park and hit the hazards. He took my hand and turned to look at me. "Hee Sun is dead." He paused for a long time. "She killed herself last night." I sat quietly looking at the steering wheel until Jenny, Alice, and Sue got to my van.

When I walked inside my father's apartment, my grandmother stood up with her arms out and tears running down her face. I saw my Aunt Myoung Soon, Hee Sun's mother, lying still on the couch. I spent the rest of the night talking with various members of my family and learned more about us all than I had in my entire life. I told my father that my boyfriend was coming from Champaign to be with me. He cracked a smile. "Did you say 'boyfriend'?" My grandmother nudged him. "See, I told you she would find someone," she said in Korean. She looked at me and tears started welling up in her eyes. "I want to see you get married before I die." Later on, my father hugged me hard and said, "I think this is a sign that our family hasn't been communicating enough, we haven't been close enough. I hope we can be closer now."

The next morning I went to meet Yeong Sun, Jenny, and Alice at Hee Sun's apartment, just a few blocks from my father's. I found out what had actually happened. The night before, Hee Sun had called her boyfriend, Kendall and told him that she was selling her place and leaving town. She wanted to see him one last time so they got a hotel room together. During the night, Kendall had woken up and saw her on the floor but didn't think anything of it. He tried to wake her up the next morning to no avail. She had shot herself in the face.

About an hour after I had arrived at Hee Sun's, a woman named Gina walked in the door. She asked who we all were. Alice looked up and said she was Hee Sun's sister. "Who is Hee Sun?" She seemed really confused and upset and burst out, "I am Kendall's girlfriend. He is really messed up and I need to find him and I want to know what's going on." Stunned, Alice told her that Kendall and Hee Sun had been seeing each other on and off for about a year, that Kendall had actually lived in the apartment we were in with her, and that he was with her when she killed herself. "Oh my god, she killed herself!" Gina started crying. "I'm so sorry for you." She was extremely upset, she'd had no idea that Kendall had been seeing anybody else, and was what could only be called completely distraught by what we told her.

Later that day, my father received a call from the hospital saying that the autopsy was complete and that Hee Sun's body would be released only to a funeral home. No one would be allowed to view the body. Jenny and Alice both completely broke down at the news. They had both seen her that past week. Jenny had lunch with her the day before her death and that was to be the last time she saw her. By Korean tradition, a service had to be held on the third day after death. My father and Yeong Sun

quickly made arrangements for a service the next day. Members of my family started showing up that night, some of whom I hadn't seen in years. It was a horrible family reunion of sorts.

Since there was no body or casket, Yeong Sun enlarged a photo of Hee Sun and my father framed it at his shop. Jenny, Alice, and I read poems from Maya Angelou, her favorite poet, with cracking voices. But the worst part of the service was having to say our farewells to a photo. No one was able to see her one last time.

This past weekend there was another service in Battle Creek, where Hee Sun's ashes were to be buried. There were also several relatives who had been unable to make it to Chicago on such short notice. I was saddened to see that very few of her friends came. At the burial site, those of us that had been closest to Hee Sun each got a rose to place on her ashes and say our final good-byes. I sank to my knees and stared through blurry eyes at the marble container that held the remains of her body. Only a few words entered my mind. Her mother could not stand on her own and it absolutely broke my heart to hear her last words to Hee Sun. It is quite possibly the worst thing in the world to see a mother who has lost a child.

I still can't really believe that someone I've known my whole life and had so many experiences with is gone. She died a few weeks before her 33rd birthday. I hope her troubled soul is finally rested.

•••

Soundtrack to this column: From Ashes Rise LPs, Strigaskó nr. 42 - Blót, Turbonegro - Ass Cobra, La Fraction LP, Radiohead - The Bends

Reach me at PO Box 2445 Champaign, IL 61825 or [kimbae1@yahoo.com](mailto:kimbae1@yahoo.com)



*Even among those of the New Left who didn't participate directly in the violence, there seems to have been a remarkable complacency, tolerance, and even enthusiasm for*

*those who did. How is it that such insanity flourished among so many educated, privileged people? It's a difficult question. In order to understand "what it was like" in the '60s, we are told, "you had to be there." I wasn't "there" (or rather, I was a small child) but I'll hazard a guess. Part of it has to do with the fact that these people were all on drugs. Weren't they, practically all the time? I'm sure there were other factors, but it's hard to avoid that one.*

—Dr. Frank, *The Blogs Of War* ([www.blogsofwar.blogspot.com](http://www.blogsofwar.blogspot.com))

Of all the critiques, reassessments, deconstructions and excusions of the '60s and the New Left, too few have asked the very obvious question that Dr. Frank poses.

Weren't these people on drugs, "practically all the time?" In a word, yes. I was one of them, and I'm here to testify.

True, there were elements, like the Maoist Progressive Labor wing of SDS, that banned drug use among its members and enjoined them to cut their hair short, wear conventional clothing, and get jobs in factories in order to organize the working class. Needless to say, they didn't attract many followers in the libertine climate of the late '60s.

But for most '60s radicals, drugs were part of everyday life. The White Panthers were also a tiny fringe movement, probably no larger than Progressive Labor, but their rallying cry of "Rock and roll, dope, and fucking in the streets" captured the spirit of the times far more effectively.

When I started attending SDS meetings in 1967, it was a running joke that the initials stood for Student Dope Smokers. That doesn't mean we weren't serious about the ideals that had drawn us there. Some of the regulars were so damn serious that they graduated to bomb-making and other forms of urban terrorism. But just as inevitable as the weekly discussions about picket lines and leaflettings and mobilizations was the after-meeting adjournment to a nearby apartment where we'd smoke pot and spin grandiose revolutionary dreams.

Despite all the theorizing and pontificating about why the New Left crashed and burned, there hasn't been an honest enough examination of the role drugs played. Even when we did acknowledge that drugs were wreaking havoc—something that became painfully obvious when the overdose deaths and the mental breakdowns started piling up—we weren't in any hurry to take responsibility. No, in fact, it was—as was the case with just about anything that went wrong—the government's fault.

The CIA, it was widely believed, was sabotaging the revolution by flooding our youth culture with "honky death drugs" like heroin and cocaine, which were seducing our brothers and sisters to abandon revolutionary, life-enhancing drugs like marijuana and LSD. Nowhere in this analysis did anyone explain why people who were supposedly intelligent enough to plan revolutions and overthrow governments were completely powerless when it came to deciding whether or not to ingest certain mind-altering substances.

It's true that as the quixotic '60s turned into the decadent '70s, the nature of drug use changed dramatically. Marijuana and LSD didn't go away, but they were augmented or replaced by consciousness-deadening substances, everything from alcohol and quaaludes to the aforementioned heroin and cocaine. Some viewed this as a major reason that the revolution ran out of steam, while others saw it as a logical result: people had become so disillusioned by their failure to end the war, poverty, racism, et al., that they understandably had to drown their sorrows.

It's probably a chicken-and-egg sort of question when it comes to the role played by hard drugs in the demise of the New Left, but what I'm more interested in is that played by the seemingly more benign "soft drugs," the ones that many people sincerely believe are harmless, or even good for you. Foremost among them, of course, is marijuana.

In the '60s, smoking a joint was often considered a revolu-

tionary act in itself. In certain circles, things haven't changed much. Wherever crowds of crusties and anarchists gather to smash globalization and the corporate state, dreadlocks and pot smoke are sure to follow. One reason the Green Party has failed to make much headway is that too many of its adherents are under the perennially stoned impression that it's the Greenbud Party.

Few people are as easily offended as militant potheads. You think Christian fundamentalists are touchy when you don't show sufficient respect for Christ on the Cross? Worried about Muslims hurling themselves into a murderous jihad if you crack a funny about Mohammed? Religious wackos have nothing on committed dope smokers; the only reason they don't exact violent revenge on you when you insult their "sacrament" is, well, because they're too stoned, man.

By now I can guarantee that some of my THC-impaired readers will be sending some very bad vibes in my direction. I know this because I have a great deal of insight into the mind of the pothead, having been one myself for 27 years. During most of those years, a day rarely passed when I wasn't stoned by noon, when I wouldn't even think of going to see a movie or going for a drive or even eating dinner without smoking a joint first.

Yet if you had suggested to me that there was anything even slightly unusual, let alone unhealthy or wrong about that behavior, I would have bitten your head off (provided, of course, that I could muster the energy). I never went off the Rastafarian deep end, to the point of making "da herb" a part of my religious practice (and even in my most demented state, I still knew that reggae sucks), but I would have argued vehemently that dope was not only harmless, it was positively good for me. And that you were an uptight, Republican wanker for daring to suggest otherwise.

Even after I gave up smoking the stuff some nine years ago after it induced one too many panic attacks, I didn't think it was all that bad. I just figured it wasn't for me. As the years went by and various parts of my mind started functioning again, I began to find certain aspects of marijuana more repulsive, most notably the smell of it being smoked (I still don't mind the smell of the plant itself) and the idiotic conversations of those smoking it. But it wasn't until last summer that I had an epiphany in which I realized the shit is just plain evil.

I was at the Reading Festival, mainly to see some friends who were playing, but also because I was hoping to run into Iggy Pop. See, Iggy and I are the same age, used to live in the same town, and know a few people in common. I don't know him personally, apart from a pot-laced encounter at a party at the Amboy Dukes' house back in 1970.

I found myself standing next to him, and being slightly intimidated (this was the heyday of the Stooges, after all), tried to break the ice by proffering one of the "killer" (yes, we really did talk like that) joints I always carried. We passed it back and forth, and I was thinking stoned thoughts to the effect of, "Whoa, I'm smoking a joint with the dude from the Stooges," which for some reason seemed extremely profound.

I opened my mouth to share this insight, but as often happens

in a highly stoned state, the requisite words failed to appear. I had a horrible image of myself standing there slack-jawed and completely vacant, which was probably not far from the truth. I worried that Iggy was going to think I was dumb, but judging from the expression on his face, his own brain had gone walkabout as well.

Anyway, all these years later, I thought it would be interesting to meet up with him again, and even more interesting to have an actual conversation as opposed to a couple stoned-out nods and grunts. BUT...

It was my own fault, really, but it's always more fun to blame someone else. Bear in mind that this was my first Reading Festival where I wasn't drinking, and that the backstage area is awash in free booze of every variety. I was pleased with myself for resisting temptation, but I hadn't counted on the sucker punch fate would throw me in the form of a certain drummer of a certain rock band that shall remain unnamed, but who is one of the most inveterate pot smokers I've ever known (he can't help it, he was raised by hippies).

He was waving a joint around, trying to get me to take a hit, and taunting me for being a "wuss" when I wouldn't. I did some quick mental arithmetic. Too quick, it turned out, because I came up with the equivalent of  $2+2=5$ .

I don't drink anymore, I told myself, so what harm could a little marijuana do? Besides, I'd smoked the shit for so many years, one or two hits off a joint wouldn't even faze me. Most of all, I would look cool in front of the other kids.

I ostentatiously sucked down a couple deep lungfuls, and made a macho gesture to the effect of, "No big thing, dude." Just then Iggy came wandering over.

I figured I'd strike up a conversation by mentioning a mutual friend of ours, but something funny happened. Well, a couple things, actually. First, I had trouble remembering our friend's name, even though it's a very distinctive name, and I've known him for almost 35 years. Then, when I did remember the name, it still didn't sound right. I said it to myself over and over, and each time it sounded weirder. Too many syllables, I thought. I wondered if I could pronounce the whole thing in one breath.

Then, when I'd finally coaxed my brain into accepting that I did indeed know the name, and could indeed pronounce it, I opened my mouth to greet Iggy. Whoa. Déjà-vu all over again. Open mouth and nothing comes out. Shut mouth to reconsider. Open mouth again and stand there so long that I begin to worry about the possibility of a bug flying in. Iggy turns away and starts talking to Chrissie Hynde.

Boy, was I mad. Thirty-one years gone by, and I'm still the same stupid pothead. What made me even madder was that Chrissie Hynde was chain-smoking reefers and talking up a storm the whole time. I thought I'd try talking to her instead, being that we were practically neighbors back in the old days (Michigan and Ohio, you know). Same result. Open mouth and nothing comes out. Finally resign myself to staring stupidly into space for the next two hours while the party carries on all around me.

The two hours turn into a full day. Twenty-four fucking hours of being unable to conceive of a thought more coherent than, "When is this shit going to stop?" Every so often I'd remember that I'd spent 27 years of my life more stoned than this, and that during most of that time I'd seriously believed I was expanding my consciousness.

As the hippies used to say, it was a bad trip, man. A total bummer. I still felt so shitty the next day that I briefly went back to drinking, went on one last binge before quitting for good. But I can hear your obvious question: just because I had a bad experience with pot, why should I conclude that it's bad for everybody else?

Fair enough. I can't prove that pot is bad for you. Some people seem to be able to smoke it all the time and still lead very successful lives. On the other hand, I'm reminded of an argument I used to have with my uncle, who was dead set against drugs.

"You're a smart guy, Larry," he'd say (yeah, I know, he was related to me, but I think he meant it anyway), "so why on earth would you risk tampering with your most valuable asset, your intelligence?"

I'd counter by pointing out that I'd gotten a university degree and done one or two other worthwhile things while being consistently stoned, and he'd reply, "Yeah, but think how much more you could have accomplished if you hadn't been operating with half your brain tied behind your back."

At the time I thought he was just being old and square. As far as I was concerned, marijuana gave me an advantage, made me smarter, not dumber. My evidence for this was the enormous changes that had happened in my life since I'd started smoking it. I'd gone from a drunken, violent thug to a more or less peace-loving hippie, I'd gotten involved in political activism and education, I'd come to some sort of terms with my sexuality, and had even developed a nascent sense of morality.

It was only after years of not being stoned that I realized I might have fallen for the old *post hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy, assuming that the changes I'd gone through while smoking marijuana were necessarily a result of smoking marijuana. I had overlooked a perhaps more obvious explanation: I'd started smoking the stuff at age 19 or 20, an age at which, guess what, people go through enormous changes as they develop from adolescence into adulthood. Oh.

Anyway, I've come round to my uncle's point of view. I can't prove that marijuana either impairs or enhances consciousness, but my ability to think and express myself is way too precious to take a chance with. While I do know smart people who smoke marijuana, most of them are relatively young. People my own age who've been smoking the stuff since the '60s are, with few exceptions, pretty sad.

Does this mean I'm jumping on a "Reefer Madness" bandwagon that I want to see pot smokers and dealers locked up and the evil weed confiscated and burned? Um, it's tempting, but no. I do think marijuana is one of the most dangerous mind-altering substances available, but education is a far better remedy than incarceration. I don't mean DARE or "Just Say No" type programs, but the kind of social pressure that has made things like smoking cigarettes

or driving while drunk seem antisocial and just plain uncool.

But do I really think marijuana is more dangerous than alcohol or heroin or cocaine? In a vital sense, yes, I do. Those other drugs have a self-limiting aspect. Drink too much and you'll fall over. Take too much heroin or cocaine and you'll pass out, perhaps even die. Smoke too much marijuana and you'll just get more stupid and annoying.

Even more dangerous is the delusion that marijuana makes you smarter, more competent, more spiritual, an all-round better person. Say what you will about drunks, few if any of them would claim there's anything admirable or noble about getting sloshed. And as long as they don't do it every day or when they're operating heavy machinery, getting drunk is accepted as a human foible, a weakness, nothing to be ashamed of, but certainly not to be proud of, either.

Not so with marijuana. People who get drunk every day, people who attempt to perform the important tasks of everyday life while under the influence of alcohol, are deemed alcoholics, and are pitied or scorned for it. Why doesn't the same standard apply to people who smoke pot every day?

Potheads will answer that it's because marijuana doesn't impair their powers of judgment the way alcohol does, but how do they know this? Why, by exercising their powers of judgment, of course. The same powers of judgment that are the principal arena in which marijuana operates.

Drunk people often attempt to convince you that they're not really drunk ("I just had a couple of beers, I'm fine"), but that doesn't mean you give them the car keys. Similarly, just because some stoned-out freak (or your own stoned-out brain) tells you that everything is normal and okay, you don't take their word for it.

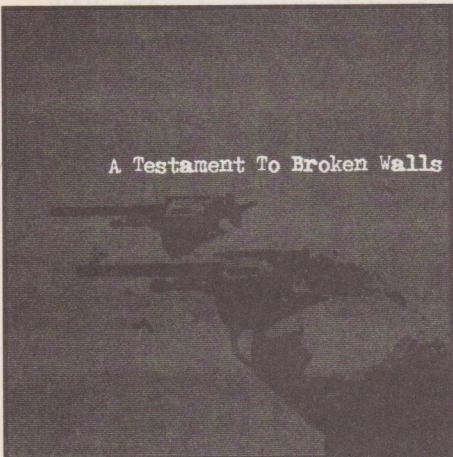
There was a time in my life when every single time I got into a crisis—personal relationships, legal trouble, career plans, whatever—my first course of action was to smoke some pot or drop a few hits of acid so I could think "more clearly" about it. If I ever get around to publishing my autobiography, you'll see what a mess that produced. An interesting mess, true, but not a particularly pretty or happy one.

Still think you're different? That no matter what marijuana did to me or to big shot movement leaders like Bernardine Dohrn, whose stoned endorsement of the Charles Manson murderers ("Dig it. First they killed those pigs, then they ate dinner in the same room with them, they even shoved a fork into a victim's stomach! Wild!") probably did more to kill off the New Left than all of Nixon's COINTELPRO programs, that somehow it will have a more salubrious effect on you?

Well, I simply ask this: would you trust your future, or even a few hours of your life, to a drug which produced Phish, tie-dye, bell bottom trousers, patchouli oil and some of the most interminable and pointless conversations in the history of civilization? Do you want to be like the Deadhead who, upon discovering that he'd run out of dope, uttered the immortal words, "Dude, this music sucks"? Only it won't be just music you're talking about. It'll be your life. ☺

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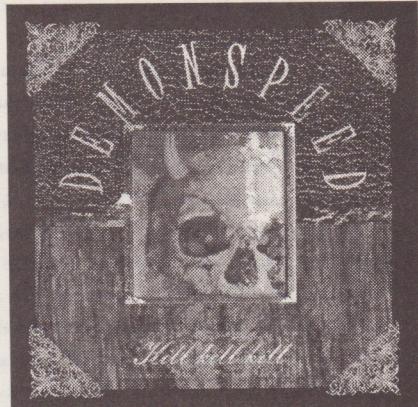
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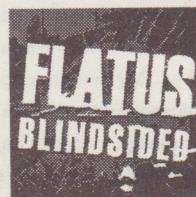
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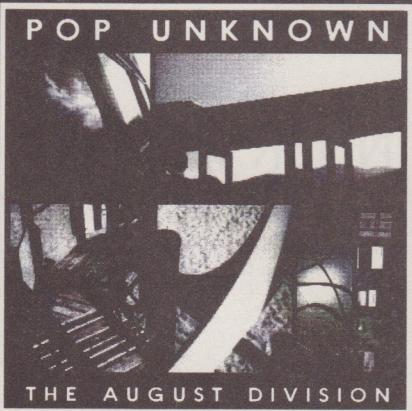
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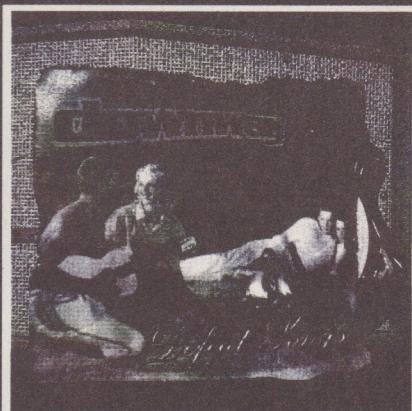
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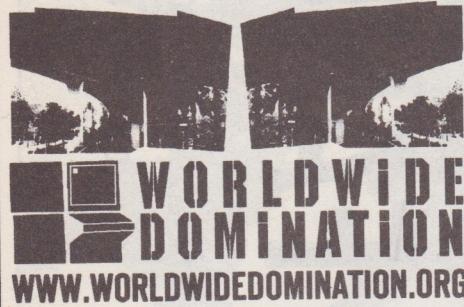
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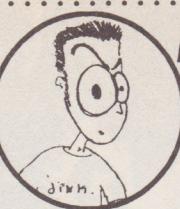
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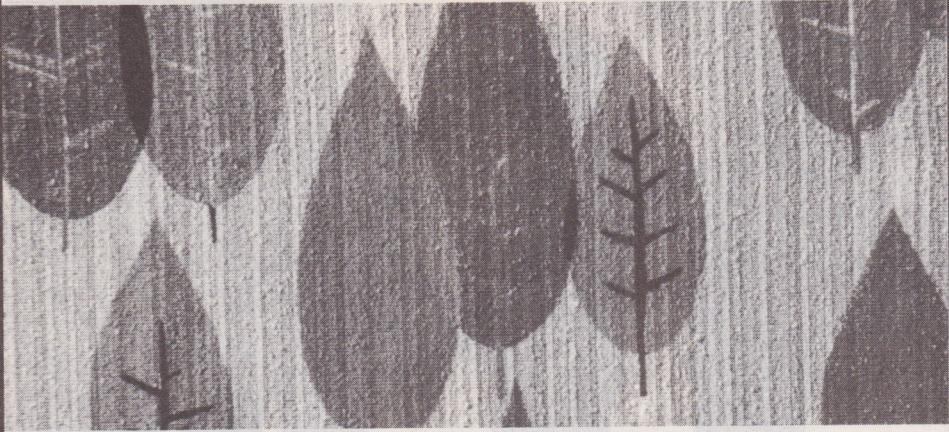
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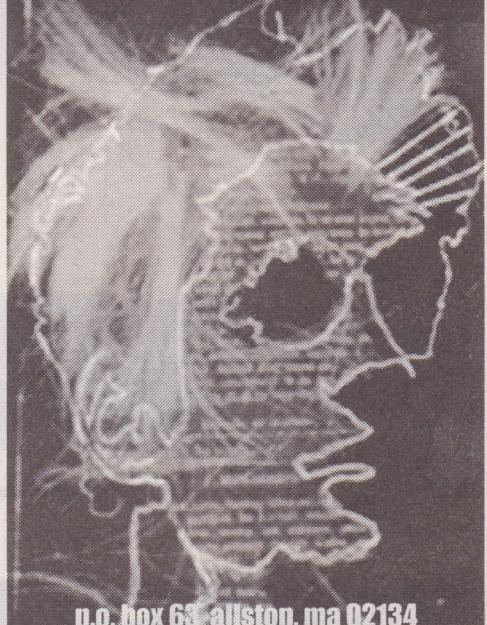
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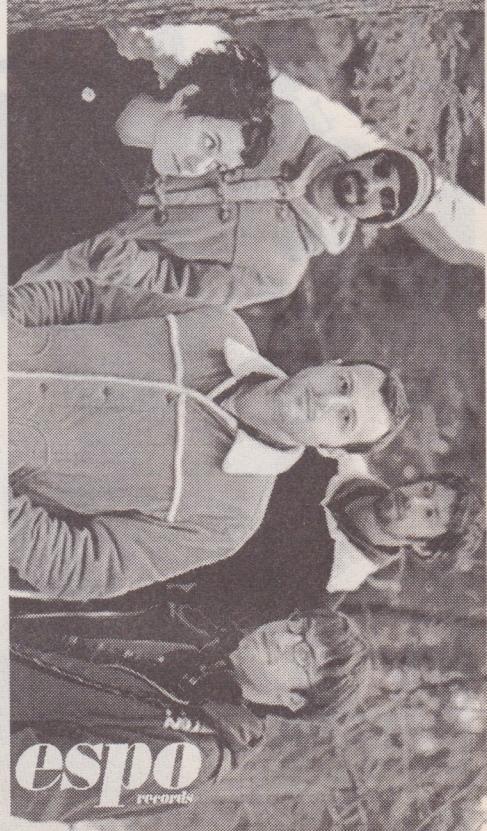


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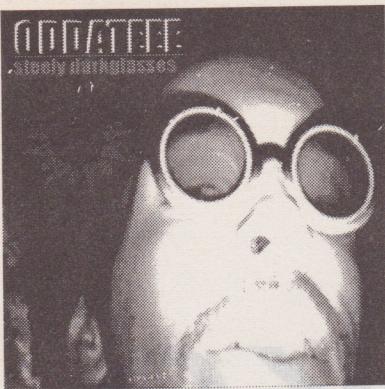


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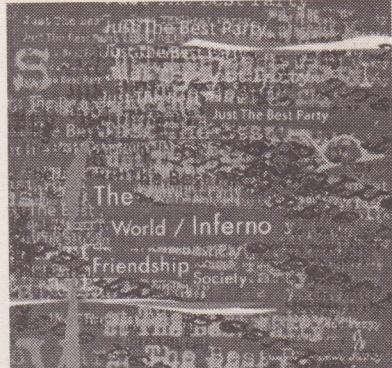


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# mikey

**M**ike Watt is a legend. Not because he fronted the legendary, early '80s punk band The Minutemen. Not because he's one of DIY's founding fathers or because he's made 27 records and loaded and unloaded his van for tour 48 times. And it's not because he's survived the death of his best friend and Minutemen bandmate D Boon, survived the loss of his father ("pop") and endured the horrific pain of a recent life-threatening illness that kept him in bed for six months.

No, it's none of these. It's for the way he's responded to all of these that Mike Watt is a legend. And it's for what he saw in these things—for what he is able to understand and communicate about these things today.

While a person could curl up in a ball, forcing their face into the dark, comforting isolation between their knees—wrecked by the pain life doled out—another chooses to reshape the pain into purposeful meanings for their life and awareness of it. Watt is, of course, of the latter.

With a speaking style that inevitably will be as dizzying to read as it was to hear, Watt spoke of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the corporate music industry's marketing strategies, his brush with death in 2000 (from an unchecked abscess in his perineum), and what it's like to be—as he calls it—a "middle-age punk-rocker" all in what felt like a single breath. Watt needed no prompter. One minute he's disclosing some of the covert, inside-joke-like messages in Minutemen songs and eradicating a few of the misconceptions surrounding their music ("They thought Minutemen was about having a band that does minute-long songs"). The next he's

making hopeful, insightful predictions on what's to come for music today ("The big attempt next will be to defeat genre . . . dilute these fuckin' categories in your mind, which is fascist and slavery"). But that's just after he's explaining why he continues to dedicate his life to making music and taking on exhaustive tours ("When all the materialism, all the things fail you, you can reach down to this"). And oh yeah, have I mentioned yet that he almost died?

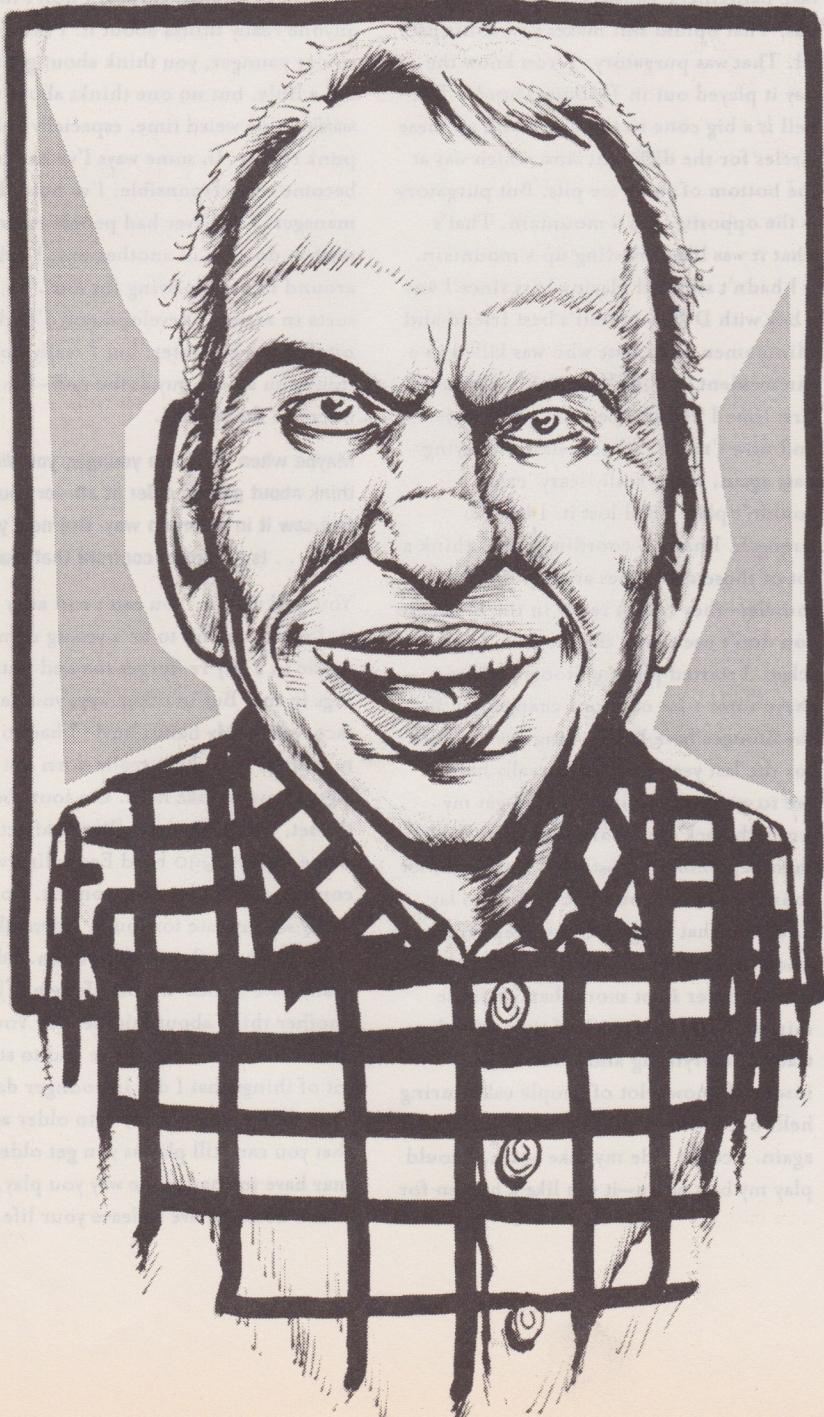
Speaking from his lifelong home in the harbor of San Pedro, California and preparing for yet another tour (52 gigs in 54 days), Watt has just finished writing his third, yet to be recorded, solo album, *Second Man's Middle Stand*. "I don't wanna be dismissed, or already figured out," he confides "I wanna make them curious about what I'm doing." He's also excited about his new book *Spiels of a Minuteman*, which reflects on his experience inside the punk movement. Featuring an introduction by renowned rock critic Richard Meltzer, an afterward by Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore and a piece by one of the SST Records founders, Joe Carducci, the book also includes Raymond Pettibon's (Black Flag guitarist Greg Ginn's brother) famed artwork.

Before speaking to him over the phone for this interview, Watt was a legend to me because the books and magazines had told me so; because the outstanding music he made told me so. But about an hour and a half of conversation later, Watt was a legend because he—with understanding and awareness so far-reaching in range and depth—told me so.

Interview by Jenny Tatone

Illustration by Dustin Mertz

# WATT



**Could you tell me a little about your illness? That has influenced your new album quite a bit, right?**

A lot of it has to do with my sickness. In 2000, I got really sick and almost died. The doctors misdiagnosed and mistreated me. I had to have emergency surgery—it almost killed me and I wrote a lot of songs about it. ¶ You ever heard of this thing by Dante called *The Divine Comedy*? You've got hell and purgatory and heaven. That's like what I went through. The sickness was total hell: days of fever and this thing was growing inside me. You know what a perineum is? [laughs] You can imagine. I didn't know what was going down and I was just getting worse and worse. It was really intense. I thought I was going for sure. The doctors figured it was way too late by the time they got to it. They couldn't tell exactly where the infection came from but the guess was it might've been an abscess that should've been just lanced right at the beginning. I do ride a bike every morning for 20 miles, so I guess it could have happened that way. When I was on the table, they cut me open right when I came in. I only had like four pints of blood left. ¶ My understanding of the whole thing is doctors are sort of like mechanics: There's good ones and bad ones. They're not the authorities we're led to believe. That's why they call it "practicing" medicine—these guys are obviously just practicing. I think if you're in it long enough—just like with music—some people just punch the clock. These guys out of med school are so idealistic. I told the surgeon, the head of the urology unit, I said, "I wanna write a song for you." He thought I was insane because when you have a fever that long you can get a little crazy. But my sister brought in a magazine the next day with me on the cover—some bass player thing—and all of a sudden it all changed for him. He brings in his class and my legs are spread [laughs] and he says "Mr. Watt, he travels the country in a van and performs for people." I'm so indebted to him for just looking me in the eye and saying he's gonna try. It was a very dramatic experience—that was the hell part. ¶ After that I come back and a friend of mine rented me a hospital bed because I had to stay laying

down—they had to cut three huge holes in me from the inside out—that's the purgatory part. There was a lot of pain but, still, I could see the light at the end of the tunnel. I could get better—I ain't goin' down. The infection was gone, so, all I had to do was heal. ¶ I thought for sure I was gonna do plastic surgery. I mean, I was like a woman: I had a hole in me. Miraculously, my body healed together with no surgery. It cleaned up and closed up after five or six months. I couldn't play that whole time.

#### **Were you bedridden?**

Yeah, in this rental hospital bed that does angles. I can't tell you the pain. I couldn't take painkillers 'cause of where the hole was. That opium shit makes you constipated. That was purgatory. ¶ You know the way it played out in *The Divine Comedy*? The hell is a big cone in the Earth and all these circles for the different sins, which was at the bottom of some ice pits. But purgatory is the opposite: It's a mountain. That's what it was like—crawling up a mountain. ¶ I hadn't stopped playing bass since I was a boy with D Boon [Watt's best friend and Minutemen bandmate who was killed in a car accident in 1986] until this. It was the first time I had stopped since I was 13—and now I'm 42. When I started playing bass again, it was really scary 'cause I couldn't play. I had lost it. I had no strength. I had no coordination. I think a lot of those memories are kept in the muscles—they're not really in the brain—so you don't use them, they're lost. I panicked. I started playing Stooges 'cause there's not a lot of chord changes. In fact, the Stooges have been taking over my life for the last year now. That really helped me to get back playing. I could get my strength back and coordination. ¶ And then September of last year, I did another tour. I can't tell you what it's like to lay down for that long and not sleep—the whole fever time and a lot of the healing time, I never slept more than a couple minutes. You lose track of time. You lose track of everything and it makes you insane. I know a lot of people call touring hell, but to me it was paradise. I could play again. I could ride my bike again. I could play my bass again—it was like a heaven for

me. That's how the story fits.

**Were the doctors concerned about you going back out on the road?**

You know what? The body doesn't like laying down; it's really bad for it. In fact, they started making me walk a few days after the surgery because if you don't get going, you're gonna have bed sores and you're gonna have real trouble. That was another thing—because of those tubes, I got bladder infections. That was the big daddy of all the pain. It was only for eight or nine days, but I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe it. ¶ When Dante wrote *The Divine Comedy*, he was in the middle of his life, in his 40s. So am I. It's a strange period. I don't think anyone really thinks about it. I think when you're younger, you think about getting old a little, but no one thinks about the middle. It's a weird time, especially being a punk rocker. In some ways I've had to become very responsible: I've never had a manager, I've never had people telling me what to do. But in another way, I ride around in a van playing for kids. So, I'm sorta in arrested development. I'm definitely not a beginner, but I really don't think I'm an old guy at the end—I'm somewhere in the middle.

**Maybe when you were younger, you didn't think about getting older at all—or you did and saw it in a certain way. But now you're here . . . Is it hard to confront that reality?**

You deal with it. You can't run away from it. I can't pretend to be a young man. The music in a way re-surges me and puts feelings in me. But in other ways you have to face reality. My hands hurt—I had to move to a littler bass. I get really worn out now at gigs. I have to take naps. On tour, before the set, I'm in the boat [Watt's affectionate name for his 1990 Ford Econoline van] conked, so I'll play my strongest. I only really stay up late for tours. Normally, I wake up like at the crack of dawn. I don't really have a rock 'n' roll lifestyle. That's another thing about middle age: You pay for all that shit. [laughs] I've had to stop a lot of things that I did in younger days. ¶ One thing you can carry into older age is that you can still play as you get older. You may have to change the way you play, but music doesn't have to leave your life.

# mike WATT

Maybe certain kinds of clichés and images they use to market the shit—especially with rock 'n' roll—to hustle people has to change, but I think you can still do it in later years. You just have to adapt and change. ¶ I come on stage looking like their dad. It trips them out because music is a way to get *away* from teachers, dads and moms. They think "I don't wanna listen to this fuckin' guy up here." But I can make this music and bring them in. I can blow their minds.

**But you have the "legendary" status already. Do you find that helps?**

I'd rather have people evaluate me for what I got at the moment. I'm very proud of everything I've done in my past, but I still gotta be in the moment. It seems like these kids are always being told, "You should like *this*, you should like *that*." You know what? They have so much control over their fuckin' lives from other elements, I think they should get to pick what they like. I would like to be held at that same criteria. They don't *automatically* have to like me or have respect. They can check me out now and if they think what I'm doing now is OK, then much respect to them. I don't wanna scare them off because of looks. The perceptions get in the way of what I'm really trying to do. It is bizarre, believe me, to be a middle-aged punk-rocker. ¶ When I was a young man and at war . . . Me and Boon—we only had our guitars against the state, against rock 'n' roll, against *everything*. In some ways, it was easier because it was all new to us. But here, you've been around the block: Are you just gonna be playin' these people? Or are you gonna really take them ethics you started out with and make them *alive* in this moment? I think it's very doable and real. I don't think it's a pose. ¶ I just had my 25th high school reunion. I didn't go to it, but I had some people talk to me from those days that I haven't heard from in a long time. They're all goin' through this mid-life-crisis cliché. They bought guitars and they think I have the life of life—I've never had a family, that I'm just this free spirit. Everybody got all these bizarre perceptions. I think it's partly 'cause of consumerism, partly 'cause of TV. People don't necessarily live things—they

**Kids, they think I have people setting up my gear, that I fly to gigs. The whole image of things—I would really like to demystify a lot of it.**

just see *images* of things or they're convinced if they buy the right items, it will *make* them these kinds of things. I would like to enlighten them a little bit from my perspective. ¶ That's one reason why I keep tour diaries. Kids, they think I have people setting up my gear, that I fly to gigs. The whole image of things—I would really like to demystify a lot of it. This is gonna be my 48th tour and my 27th record, but you know what? I wanna make 27 more, 48 more tours. I really think I'm in the middle—I don't think I'm at the end.

**Do you feel your outlook has a lot to do with the attitude that you have?**

Yeah. The big difference is I don't have D Boon anymore. He's been gone 16 years. I still can't even fathom how I can get the nerve to get up and do this—that's the momentum that he gave me. It seemed like in those days I didn't need anybody

in the world except him and as long as he was with me we could take on *everyone*. That's what the Minutemen was. And now, for the last 16 years, I've been by myself. Now, I am very much convinced I need other people. I didn't imagine he could ever die. I never thought about that; I *couldn't* think of that. That was the hardest lesson for me to learn. That has changed me. Losing him, losing my pop, things like this . . . The really hard things in my life happened just to tell me this is very fragile. You really do gotta make things count, be intense, play every gig like it's your last gig, put it all in. I wrote a song about this for the Minutemen called "Life Is A Rehearsal." But life is definitely *not* a rehearsal. This is it. ¶ Minutemen was . . . I didn't need second bands or side projects. All my creative energy came out through Minutemen. It had a very strong impact on me—those words and those times. It seems punk was so small in the US then. People that were into it—they *really* loved it and the fanzines, all the little bands, all the pads all around the country . . . It was such an education for me. ¶ I gotta tell you, punk is very popular now. A lot of kids ask me about the old days; they really wanna know where it came from. It didn't just come off the shelf or off MTV. They really wanna know what it got born out of, what the time was like and they're really curious about it. It's kind of a trip telling them about it. I don't feel that sentimental because a lot of those ethics and values are still in practice—they're in practice with me and a lot of other cats like me. ¶ I don't think it's just something from the past. A lot of the things are still carrying on. It wasn't really a sound, it wasn't even a look, it was a state of mind. You just couldn't fit in and wanted to make your own world. How can that ever get old-fashioned? I don't care how much it's co-opted, there's *always* gonna be an outside.

**I think people are so fascinated by what they don't get to be a part of and they kind of forget about what's happening right now.**

Yeah, especially younger people. Stuff like punk appears to be very creative and that

anybody can do it. So they wonder "Why is it all being manufactured and handed down to me?" What happened? What was punk about? There's a book that just came out called *Our Band Could Be Your Life*.

Reading that book, it comes off like a gift for some failure; like it was written to help these guys that were doing all this shit for nothin' and they went down losers. I don't get that at all from my experience. OK, yeah, we didn't turn into platinum sellers, but I dunno if that was really the point.

Why is everything always measured in those terms anyway? Man, I tell you, just playing outside of our town was more than we could expect. Making records, writing our own songs—it was an unqualified success on all levels. When I think of all those bands in that book—even the bands that aren't in the book—I don't think they were failures.

**That was a very important part of music history, as well, so that seems weird the book would say that.**

Yeah, well, he doesn't really say a lot. He's trying to be third person in the writing. But you just get this feeling that everybody hates each other. But that's the way bands are. They're very close—kind of like marriages. On one hand, we all wanted our own sound, we all wanted our own identities. But, on the other hand, we were small and disassociated, so we needed to help each other out.

**Like a community?**

Yeah, but a lot of autonomy in that community. No one really went to ask permission. There was no leader. It was very decentralized and really fertile and because no one paid attention, it was a smaller thing. You built a big sense of self-reliance instead of having everything handed to you. You had to go and figure this stuff on your own. So, I think, in a lot of ways, those weren't bad times to come around. ¶ I get asked this question all the time: "You know all these bands like Bush are making money, don't you think your band came around at the wrong time?" I don't really know how to answer that. I just ask them "C'mon if we were a new band now, do you really think it would be any easier for us?" I think it would've been so much more difficult.

The lines in those days, there wasn't as much fuzzy gray middle: There was Journey over there and Black Flag over here. In some ways, it was much easier.

**Because it was fresh and new?**

It was fresh. It was left alone, so, it was much easier. You didn't have to worry so much about being co-opted at all. There wasn't even MTV yet. That was the neat thing about touring—you could actually see how everyone interpreted punk. There wasn't really one way to do it. You kinda knew from the 45s or the fanzines, but until you actually went to the pad and slept on their floor, you wouldn't know what it was like. It was really neat—all these little petri dishes forming their own versions. Nowadays it's hard because communication is so quick, you know what everybody's doing. Lame-ass human tendencies to wanna be automatically excepted by just wearing the right uniform kick in. You don't get freshness. You get uniformity and conformity—all the shit we hated in high school.

**It seems like today's challenge is to follow without repeating what's already been done.**

But you know what? Captain Beefheart, Iggy Pop, and Woodie Guthrie were doing a lot of the stuff we were doing in punk long before us. What was new was us finding out about it. I think that nowadays it's still possible to do that. I think it's easier to make a band now than it's ever been, or to make a label and stuff. But there's always gonna be the burden of being creative and striking people with weird perspectives. I don't think that challenge is ever gonna be any easier—maybe it shouldn't be made easier because nothing ventured, nothing gained. ¶ All kinds of folks are always gonna have soul and they're always gonna be faced with the dilemma of "How am I gonna prove to myself that I'm alive?" By doing this, maybe people can prove to themselves that they're alive. That's what art is for. It's kind of neat—when all the materialism and all the things fail you, you can reach down to this. ¶ I remember first hearing the word "punk." It was really strange for me because, in my town, that was the word given to some guy who gets fucked in jail for cigarettes. I

could not imagine people calling their music "punk". But when I went and saw it up in Hollywood, they were just saying "Fuck it, we don't care, we're gonna call ourselves the worst thing we can. We're gonna write our own songs, we're not gonna just copy the Led Zeppelin record." So, it was me that had to change. ¶ If I had one goal about doing gigs and making records, it's that I'd like to instill in people confidence. I'd like to say, "Hey, you know, it's free up here. You can go crazy. Don't follow rules. Don't follow market trends. This is too precious of an incubator here. If I'm doing it, surely you can." This was a message D Boon tried to get over too. I can't tell you how many times he was pulled off the stage by bouncers who wouldn't believe he was in the band. He loved it. It was really fucking with those paradigms and idioms. We wouldn't even use tuners. We were bizarre. ¶ We had felt like we were always under the heel of rock 'n' roll for so long as teenagers and that's what kept us from writing our own songs and expressing our own personal stuff. We were really at war with rock 'n' roll. We thought it was more insidious than your parents making you cut your hair. We thought it was the other so-called "hip" people saying that there was only one way—you either came through this gate or you didn't get in. We were really upset about that. I still see that attitude today.

**Do you think that the punk rock "sound" should progress?**

Yeah, always. But you know what I think? There are new sounds; there's just a little fear. This ain't always the kids or people in the crowd. A lot of this is other musicians. They think "Oh, I've worked so long on trying to get this and now this motherfucker came and brought all this new stuff that I gotta bone up on." So, I think the musicians are very resistant to change. It makes people very conservative. Like me: all my 45's are from the late '70s. Somebody tells me about a new record and I don't know about it, I can feel my gut automatically start to go, "Oh man, I don't need this." But I have to cure it and say, "Yeah, you do." ¶ John Fogerty

# mike WATT

had this song called "Looking Out My Back Door." That's the thing—it's always so much easier to look back. It is tough to deal with the moment, which is *new* sounds and *new* challenges.

**Do you have any predictions on what you think will be the next movement in music? Or do you think it's happening right now?**

Yeah, it is happening right now. I think the big attempt next will be to defeat genre. Genre is something the record company people came up with to make their job easier. I think people are finally waking up to the fact that the main idea is to *make their job harder*. The idea of "genre" is really lame—you don't listen to music, you listen to *types* of music and then *sub-types* inside of that. It's fuckin' categories in your mind, which is fascist and slavery. Yeah, it makes marketing easier, but on all the other fronts it makes things so much tougher and harder and bigoted and segregated. John Coltrane said music is for *uplifting*, for bringing people together. It's a big reservoir. It's not a bunch of little tricklet piss streams. I think defeating genre's gonna be a strong attempt, especially with the kids. They can feel it. They can feel that this shit is just hustles and they're gonna try to combat it and get back to the fact that it's just music.

**I wanted to ask about your commitment to DIY. What keeps you loyal to this?**

Well it seemed to work in the beginning—don't fix it if it works. Also, I read interviews with rock 'n' roll stars and they're blaming people always for what's bad in their life and in their creative process. I think if you do stuff yourself, you've got nowhere to look except in the mirror. It's about taking responsibility.

**When you go on stage do you have any thoughts in mind about what you want to accomplish? Maybe something that you've traditionally always hoped?**

I'm usually scared shitless. I'm not a born entertainer, you know. But like I was saying to you before about making the stage safe to take chances, I really try to get that over, that is one of my main goals. I don't really care about living up to any of these fuckin' stereotypes for rock 'n' roll. I'd almost like

illness must just change your entire life, or at least how you see it. In what ways do you think it really changed you?

I got a lot more sure about expressing things deep inside me and not being afraid, 'cause you don't know if a time's gonna come where you might not get them out. You gotta get them out; you gotta *push* them out. I started writing poems. It started getting even *more* intense with the diaries and sharing what's inside me. Obviously this is uncomfortable for a lot of people—a lot of people don't wanna hear this kind of stuff. But I just felt, inside me, that I had to get it out and talk about issues. When you're in this rock 'n' roll youth culture and all this shit, you're not really supposed to talk about being a middle-aged guy. But these are weird times. It's *always* been weird times, but they're different kind of weird times. This is where I'm at and I can't be afraid. I had to get a lot of courage just to fight that sickness. I need more courage just to ask why. Even though I was a Minuteman and all the old days, it's still very scary for me to deal with this stuff.

**As hard as it was to endure that experience, do you ever wonder if there was some sort of meaning or purpose that it had?**

Yeah, yeah I do. I feel like I had to go through it. Something had to knock me down.

**For what reason?**

To really think about what's important. I'm not a masochist, but I really think it happened for a reason. Getting on a stage in front of a lot of people you can get really self-absorbed and full of yourself. Something what happened to me really humbles you. I don't have a lot of things that other people use to make the important things in life really mean something like family and stuff. I'm in this kind of arrested development business, playing around in the boat, playing bass. I think I needed that sickness to really think about these things and make decisions and evaluations. You get into these modes: Another record, another tour, another record. You're just almost in cruise control, auto pilot. And all of a sudden reality gets in the way and stomps its foot down and says, "You have to deal." ☺

**I'm usually scared shitless. I'm not a born entertainer, you know. But like I was saying to you before about making the stage safe to take chances, I really try to get that over, that is one of my main goals.**

to have it be invented for them right there. Not like *I* invented but like, "Here's my take on it and you can do it too."

**We talked about your new album earlier and I wanted to come back to it. Everything is written, it's just not recorded yet?**

Yeah. What happened is I got sick and as soon as I got better, I had to start touring — it cost \$35,000 to save my life. I've had my van insured for over 25 years, but *I've* never been insured. [laughs] I had to get to work. The album is in the backlog. I had to get better first. I had to get stronger. I thank everybody for bearing with me.

**Something as painful to go through as your**

**F**ederation X is going to kill you. Make your head explode. Make your brain melt. Reduce your teeth to their component powders and enamels. Or at least clear up your stuffy nose. Because if you've got a problem—psychological or physical—then they've got the cure: play it loud. And not just loud like a couple of guys with a couple of amps. More like *apocalypse* loud.

The latest in that great Northwest tradition of crush-you-like-a-bug bands like Karp and the Melvins, Fed X (cute, huh?) churns out stripped-down rock 'n' roll that's as thick and dark as the Washington woods from which they hail. Call it the thinking man's stoner-rock, even if they can't figure out why the fuck people keep calling them "stoner-rock." After a few years thundering through basements up and down the West Coast in a '77 Impala (and after several DIY releases on their own Molasses Manifesto and other labels), they elbowed aside a generation of raunchy garage rockers to become the first Bellingham band to sign with local-to-them label Estrus Records. Since their not-so-star-spangled *American Folk Horror* full-length came out not even a month before September 11, they've been elbowing aside the people who think it's just great they happen to have a flag on the back of their record (even if it is all torn up).

I asked singer/guitarist Bill Badgley and other singer/guitarist Beau Boyd (I missed drummer Ben Wildenhaus and owe him a round of drinks as apology) what's so horrifically folky about America, how bad work sucks and why they always have to turn everything up as loud as it will possibly go.

Interview by Chris Ziegler

#### So are you deaf yet or what?

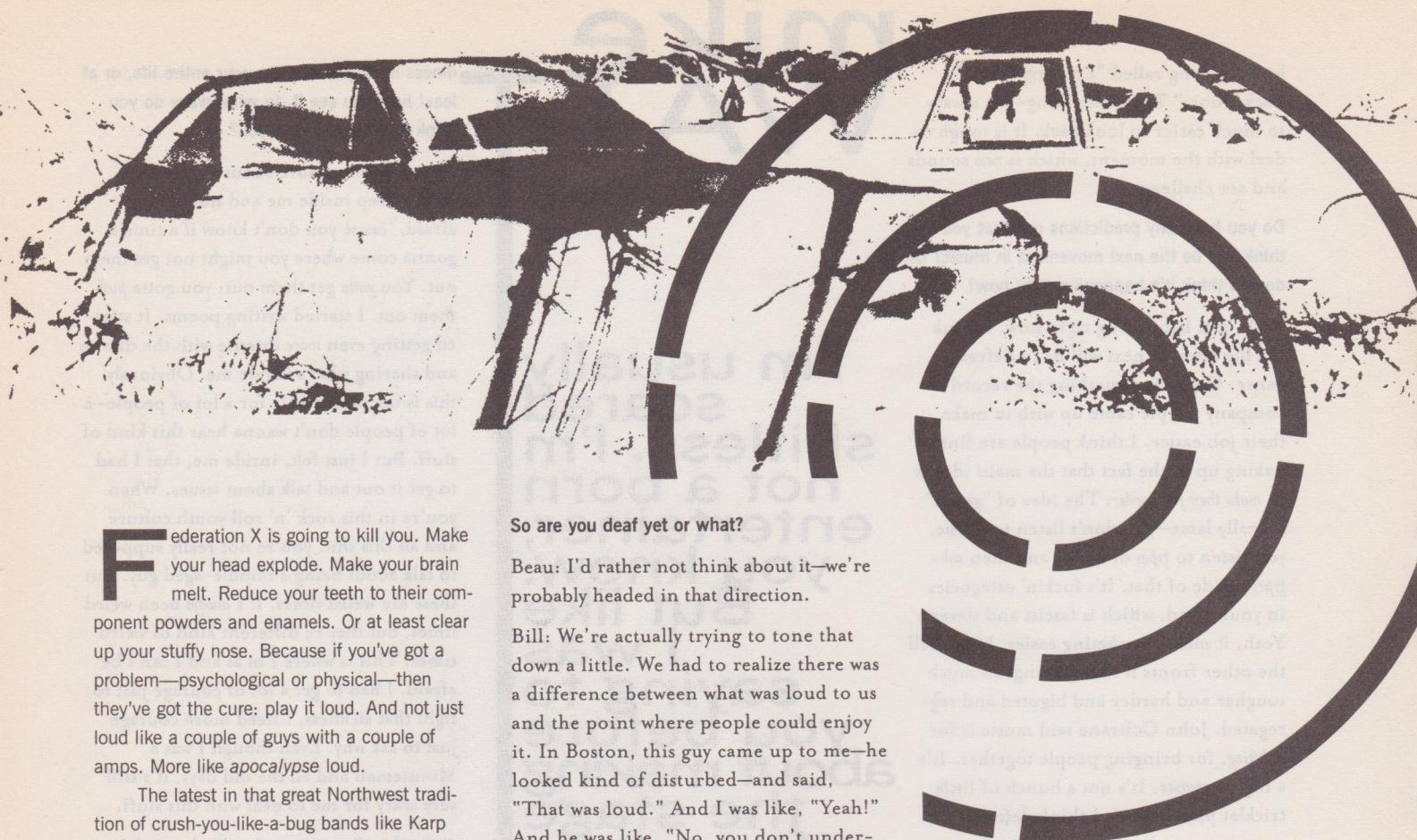
Beau: I'd rather not think about it—we're probably headed in that direction.

Bill: We're actually trying to tone that down a little. We had to realize there was a difference between what was loud to us and the point where people could enjoy it. In Boston, this guy came up to me—he looked kind of disturbed—and said, "That was loud." And I was like, "Yeah!" And he was like, "No, you don't understand. My sinuses drained." My dad always makes fun of me because I'm 25 and I can't hear anything. I don't condemn earplugs—we thought about wearing earplugs when we practice—but it's more just a personal obsession with me to be lost in the onslaught.

#### Why the obsession? Is this like part of that whole punk rock nihilism thing, destroying yourself with your own music?

Bill: [laughs] Just let the sound tear you limb from limb! It's probably always just been this thing for me, where I needed to wrap myself up in it. It's never enough, either—you always try and get deeper and deeper inside this thing, where it occupies every space completely.

Beau: I grew up watching loud bands. You can see a band and the music can be good, but if it's not loud, there's an aspect of it that's missing. It consumes you when it's loud. It's that emotion when you've just reached the end of what any kind of rational thought can express—I like music that keeps you there. The best moments of my



life have been at shows when you're in that emotional state where all meaning just kind of flies out the window and you're just lost in the moment.

Bill: When I went to my first show—I was like 15 or whatever—it was the loudest, most insane thing I'd ever seen. I remember breathing this breath, like it was the biggest breath I'd ever breathed in my life. It was like being home. I guess I'm just trying to get back to that place—10 years later, you get acclimated to things, and it's a constant process of trying to get back to that first insane moment.

#### Sounds like an addiction.

Bill: Well, now that I'm older, I think I'm kind of weaning myself out of it. It used to be, well, we can't play good, but in order to make this whole "big" thing, you use all these amps and create this huge sound to get lost in. But I've been describing it as getting lost for a long time, and after a while, you have to make it more cerebral—have an actual conversation somehow. This

is the thing that keeps me up at night: there's gotta be some way for both sides to communicate with each other in that moment. At a rock show, you get a lot of physical communication, but it's not very cerebral. Just kind of caveman-ish. I don't know if I like bands that sit down and have a conversation, but I want to figure out how to get this feeling going.

#### How do you work that out in real life?

Bill: Last night, I was literally dragging people up out of their chairs and making them stand in front. I was so pissed off—some nights, people are just so ho-hum. Playing shows all the time, you run into this "showgoer" attitude, and after a while, you're like, "Fuck that! If you want to be in here, be in here! And if you don't want to be a part of this, go away!"

Beau: Most people at most of the shows I've ever been to in my life are pretty much indifferent, or at least they appear that way. If they're feeling anything about the music, they aren't showing it.

Bill: I love to be physical with the music, but do it in a way that's not abrasive to people. This kind of came out of playing shows with really bad PAs, where I would just sing to individual people. That was really fun, and one of the biggest breakthroughs I experienced was going up to one person and being pretty sexual with them. Not like touching them in any weird way, but just being extremely close to them. When I felt their uncomfortability come up, I'd back off—a little bit. When it worked right, I was extremely happy and extremely open with them. I tried not to do it to girls though. You can do that to a guy and everyone goes, "Well, he might be gay but he's probably just joking." There's not a feeling of any lines getting crossed. But if girls wanted to be a part of it, they would join in. And it wasn't shouting at people, but singing into people's necks and ears, having a lot of eye contact. If I have a choice, I always try and turn it into something about the song. That will affect them.

## FEDERATION





Calling the album *American Folk Horror* was a way to look at some different aspects of our culture—looking at this really fat, spoiled country and saying there's a lot of things about this country that are great, but there's a lot that's not

**Where's the indifference come from?**

Beau: I think a lot of scenes nowadays are just kind of tired, just kind of looking for direction. We've played basically all kinds of shows: shows that are horrible where we clear the room; shows where nobody is there to begin with, shows where it's a roomful of people who just stand there with their mouths open; shows where people are stoked and they're into it and they seem to get it. Every tour we go on seems to have a theme, as if the entire music scene—if there is a music scene—suddenly changed. So one tour is all pop-punk bands, one tour is all lame emo bands; this time around, it was all really lame garage-rock bands. ¶ If you grow up in a town where all the bands get their influences from MTV and popular radio, it's a vicious circle: you just become a watered-down version of everything else, which is already a watered-down version of something from twenty years ago. But there seem to be areas where people get it: Missoula, Montana; Cleveland; Flagstaff, Arizona is definitely one of our towns—those kids are supercool, probably one of the coolest scenes I know of right now. I don't know what it is that brings people together in the same place—I think it's chance, because I'm not much of a 'fate' person—but you figure if there's 10,000 scenes in this country, there's bound to be a handful that are really good.

**Do any of these experiences you've had on tour—like this indifference, this laziness, this watering-down and copycatting—relate to the concept of *American Folk Horror*?**

Bill: For me personally, calling the album *American Folk Horror* was a way to look at some different aspects of our culture—looking at this really fat, spoiled country and saying there's a lot of things about this country that are great, but there's a lot that's not. There's a lot of fat, if you will, that needs to be shaved off. ¶ Looking at some of the horror of the technological and industrial revolution that happened at the turn of the

last century—people from all over the world came here to America to do something, and they did it, and did it so well that they started going out and getting involved in other peoples' interests. It sort of split our culture within our nation, the advances that we've gone through, the move-away from a farm-based society. It's been kind of weird since September 11 because I think what happened is the coming home to roost of the American folk horror that's been happening outside the country.

Beau: I think of the album as almost a concept album, like almost one big saga—well, that might be too ambitious—but one big story about the human condition.

Bill: I'm in no way against technology, but it has definitely had some scary repercussions. It's kind of an open-ended dialogue about that—I pulled some pieces out that to me, in some weird way, seemed congruent. One thing I was thinking about a lot was how fast that change had happened. My grandparents were sharecroppers. They lived in shacks with dirt floors. It's insane when you think about it now—I'm not in my own house right now, but I'm staying at a normal American house, with wall-to-wall carpet, a really nice personal computer, CDs in every room—because even though not everyone's grandparents were in that situation, I think a lot of people's were, just three generations ago. And so I did a lot of thinking about what that meant, the effort not to lose the work ethic they had, because I think that's disappearing.

**What do you mean, "work ethic"? This is starting to sound sort of Republican.**

Bill: It doesn't do me any good to go work at 7-Eleven to help Mr. 7-Eleven make more money—we don't need to spend the little minutes and moments that we get here helping people we don't know do something we probably wouldn't want done anyway. But I work my ass off when it comes to something that I do want to see go on. I

think too many people have such a negative correlation with working that they can't even work on shit they believe in. And that's sad. There's a lot of people busting ass to try and work on something they love. When I talk about work, that's work.

Beau: Everybody fucking hates work. I despise work. I refuse to work. I refuse to let myself end up being another slob in a stupid pointless job, so I'm going to put everything I've got into this. This is what I love to do. I could either go out and find a job that's not going to make me happy, or I could take a chance. What's the worst that could happen? I find myself still struggling in 10 years? So I just go out and get a stupid job then.

Bill: I had this conversation with somebody the other day—they were talking about, "Well, that's just what you do. Get up, go to work, come home." And they're talking about Mr. 7-Eleven. And I go, "Well, fuck, that doesn't make any sense." Just the idea that what you do in life is your work and that's it—it's like breathing. And in a working-class situation, I noticed it's work all day just to stay in the same place, and that's where the meaning drops out. Sharecroppers, for example: they worked all day, but their payment wasn't monetary. They just got to stay alive! "Congratulations! You get to get up tomorrow, do some more!" Some people are trapped in that, but it's a very ineffective way to work. For me, it just came to a point where I'm not going to do that—I can't do that. But I still have the inborn middle-class thing where I have to be working, so I want to work on something that will pay off for me in some way. I'm not just talking about the music—it has to be an investment, not just throwing work down a work-hole.

Beau: I want it to be something meaningful, not just something I have to do just to stay alive. ☺

# the underground speaks for itself:

Black Flag  
Kathleen Hanna  
Noam Chomsky  
Sleater-Kinney  
Thurston Moore  
Jello Biafra  
Frank Kozik  
Ian MacKaye  
Steve Albini  
Ruckus Society  
Winston Smith  
Porcell  
Jody Bleyle  
Mordam Records  
Los Crudos  
Negativland  
Matt Wobensmith  
Chumbawamba  
Central Ohio Abortion  
Access Fund  
Art Chantry  
Ted Leo  
Jem Cohen  
Voices in the  
Wilderness  
Duncan Barlow  
Jon Strange

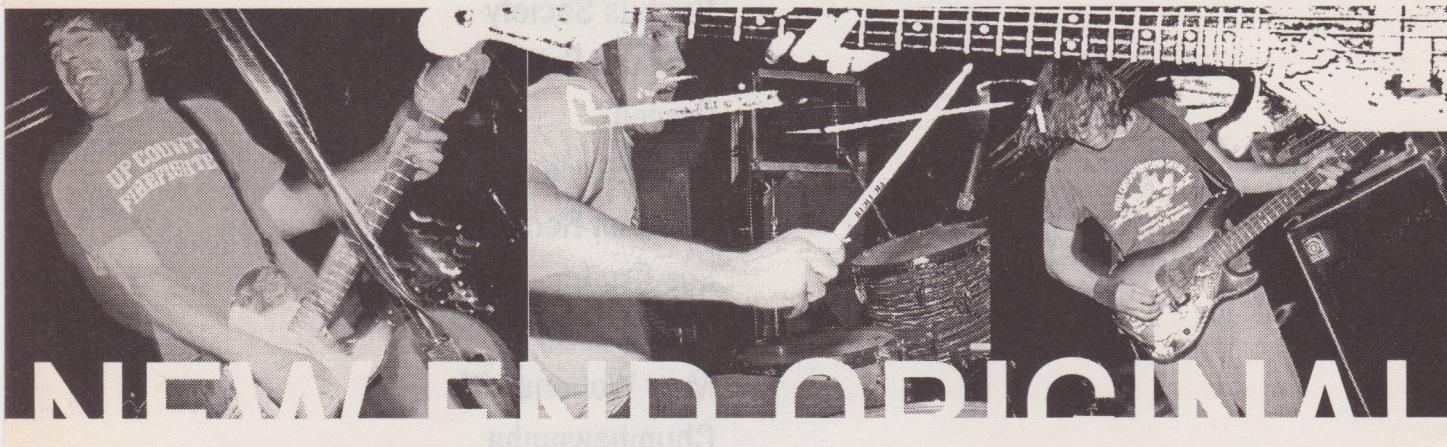


## WE OWE YOU NOTHING

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# new end original



I'VE ALWAYS FELT THAT IN PUNK ROCK, MUSIC WAS ALWAYS KIND OF SECONDARY. THERE WAS SOMETHING TO THE MUSIC, OBVIOUSLY, BUT WHAT WAS REALLY HAPPENING WAS THE INTENTION, WHAT YOU WERE *DOING* WITH THE MUSIC.

**A**s New End Original first cruised into Chicago on September 21, 2001, the government and media busily prepared the country for a long, broad war against an elusive enemy. Inside the Fireside Bowl that night, though, a different kind of battle raged. This one was mental, though the enemy formidable: complacency.

The San Francisco band emblazoned their rallying cry on their T-shirts: "I never want to say my best days are behind me"—a line from "Lukewarm," the first track on *Thriller*, New End Original's debut on Jade Tree Records.

Guitarist (and former *Punk Planet* columnist) Norman Arenas had sworn off rock upon the breakup of his previous band, Texas is the Reason (NEO bass player Scott Winegard is also a Texas alumnus). But when he and long-time friend Jonah Matranga (of Onelinedrawing and Far fame) got together, Arenas couldn't escape rock's pull any better than light can outrun a black hole. When Winegard and drummer Charles Walker signed on, the final pieces of the Voltron-esque formation fell into place. With guitar in hand, Arenas hit the touring circuit for the first time in three years.

His thousand-plus day hiatus from the road left Arenas unprepared for how much punk had changed in his absence. Shortly after a second show in Chicago a couple of months later, Arenas called me from somewhere in Iowa—he thought—and he was riled up.

He talked about what he coined the “atrophy” of DIY—and its regeneration. And why when New End Original takes the stage, the band’s rallying cry of “I never want to say my best days are behind me” represents not only a personal ideal but a metaphor for the underground. Are independent music’s best days behind it?

Interview by Kyle Ryan

Photos by Mark Beemer

#### What were some of the things that were shocking or surprising to you when you went out on tour for the first time in so long?

This is the first stretch of touring in my life where we’ve had to play shows that weren’t all ages. That’s really weird. It wasn’t like it was a conscious decision on our part—we didn’t say “We want to play this show 18-plus, we want to play this show 21-plus.” It was just that there was actually a *vacancy* of venues and promoters that cared enough to put on all ages shows. They exist in some places for sure, but for a lot of other places in the country, not only doesn’t it exist, you don’t get the sense that people know it *should* exist. It seems like the kids that I meet are just bummed that we’re playing a 21-plus show—and rightfully so! But at the same time, there’s no options being provided. It’s not like, “It sucks that you’re playing this 21-plus show. I can put on a better show at a church, and I will.” There used to be a sense of wanting to do something and making it happen that I feel is lacking now. It’s disheartening.

#### Something you had also mentioned before was a lack of zines or at least dwindling numbers of them.

Again, I don’t know what that might be a symptom of; I don’t know how that possibly happened. That’s such an integral piece of punk. As someone who did a fanzine myself, I feel really strongly about the importance of them and having nonmainstream media. ¶ I know there are different

kinds of punk-rock scenes. I know that underground punk still exists. I know that we’re playing Gilman Street in February—I know that it’s still open. I know that these things still exist, but for a band that doesn’t sound like Crass, or Born Against, or Propagandhi, where does that leave us? I’ve always felt that in punk rock, music was always kind of secondary. There was something to the music, obviously, but what was really happening was the intention, what you were *doing* with the music.

#### Like what?

I think it’s important that people see punk as a community—more like an ethical institution than a sound.

If you look at it purely musically, punk hasn’t shrunk. But if you look at the traditional DIY ethic behind punk, it seems to have ebbed since the beginning of the 1990s, while complacency seems to have grown. What do you think is behind that?

I’ll give you two examples of things that I feel weird about now but didn’t feel weird about at the time: ¶ One thing believe it or not had to do with *Antimatter*. At the time, modesty aside, it was a fairly influential zine. One of the things that *Antimatter* did that I regret was accept advertising. Before *Antimatter*, the only fanzines that were accepting advertising on serious level were *MRR*, *Suburban Voice*, and *Jersey Beat*. *MRR* said, “We’re not even accepting advertising from stuff we don’t think is punk anymore.” So that automatically excluded tons of my friends’ bands and probably my band too. *Jersey Beat* and *Suburban Voice* both kind of moved out of hardcore circles and more into post-punk and post-hardcore and indie-rock circles, so there wasn’t an outlet for hardcore punk at that time. *Antimatter* came in, and I felt that I was doing some kind of community service by accepting advertising. There were not that many places to advertise—I still believe that record labels *need* to advertise. But what I did feel happened was that people didn’t look at advertising the same way that I did. When a lot of fanzines came out in *Antimatter*’s wake, they basically indiscriminately accepted advertising. They accepted advertising from major labels or from bands that really

didn’t have anything to do with it or anything to do with what we were doing. Now how much of an effect that actually had, I don’t know. I do know that lots of kids were e-mailing me for advice on how to start fanzines, and I never got questions like “What’s the best way to get a person to open up in an interview?” or “How would you feel if I interviewed these political activists?” The questions I got were, “How do you get advertising? Do you make your living from this fanzine? How much do you charge?” That’s what people wanted. People didn’t want to start a fanzine as a means of communication or expression, people were starting a fanzine for a career.



That was never my intention with *Antimatter*. ¶ So *Antimatter* died in 1995, and then Texas is the Reason came out. Texas came out in a climate of heavy political bands—Earth Crisis or Chokehold or whoever it was at the time was permeating the hardcore scene with hard political stances. We definitely had a reaction to that. I felt like, and I still feel that, whenever you see an expression that’s so forthright that there’s no room for discussion—especially when it’s coming from a band of people screaming at you—that’s bound to become cartoonish and almost contradictory to the cause. As a reaction to that, I think Texas—again unconsciously—decided that we wanted to do a band that was just going to be open for everyone. We were very staunch about how we were going to proceed ethically, but musically and lyrically, we knew we wanted to do something that was more universal, less . . .

## **Firestorm?**

Yes. [laughs] Now in retrospect, I kind of see that people missed all of the ethics and all of the idealism that we actually had 'cause we weren't screaming it at them. But I feel like that the bands that came after that—not all the bands, but a good chunk of them—kind of missed the idealism and principles that we had and just went straight to the music. They totally missed everything. So now what you've got is a glut of bands that don't mean anything, that don't stand for anything, that don't have any principles, that don't have any history or roots in punk who just think they're playing *rock*. It's all about *the rock*. And I've said it to you earlier, and I'll say it again: It's not all about *the rock*. If it's all about *the rock*, then I don't want anything to do with that.

**People will say that music isn't inherently political. You can play music just for the music's sake, just for the expression.**

I don't necessarily believe that every band has to be this huge ethical machine.

**But people can always say that Texas is the Reason signed to a major label. You did all these ethical, Fugazi-esque things, like playing only all-ages shows and keeping door prices low, but you also signed.**

I will still say to this day that I don't necessarily believe that signing to a major label in and of itself is the most horrible thing a band can do. I really believed back then that we would be the band that would have total creative control, that would do whatever we wanted to do. We would just be using this mammoth corporation to distribute to the record, and I think that most bands think that they're going to be the band to do that when they sign to a major label. Guess what? You're not. None of us are. ¶ And that's another reason why I guess all these things may be linking a little bit more to us—because all of us have been through that wringer and kind of understand what it means to be in a position where you think you're in control but you're not. And that's really scary.

**Not that you can't be in that situation on an indie label. Just about everyone has horror stories about working with independent labels.**

Sure, and honestly it again kind of all boils down to what you simply put as the "atrophy of DIY," in a sense that there aren't really that many options. As somebody who's been on his share of independent labels, I also know that independent labels are no walk in the park. ¶ When New End started, our first conversation was, "What are we going to do in this climate? How are we going to release our music in this climate?" Really it came down to two options. One of the options was Jade Tree. Jade Tree is one of the few labels that has a code of principles under which they operate. They don't operate under the guiding light of the bottom line, the way a lot of independent labels are doing now. The options were either Jade Tree or start our own label and put it out ourselves. Luckily the guys at Jade Tree wanted to put out the record. That was a lot less work for us. [laughs] ¶ I met a person on this tour I feel actually is a good person, who runs an independent record label. He's got some bands on his label that he really, really loves. The label's just kind of starting, and he really wants to dedicate his life to it and to his bands. I respect that so much. There's one band in particular that he was talking about. They sounded like a pretty cool band. And then we kind of drifted off the subject for a second, and somehow we got onto something about how he was checking SoundScan numbers for this record. And I looked at him totally confused, and said, "Why?" His answer was, "Well, let's say that independent record label owner X likes this band, and let's say band X on his label wants to take them out on tour. If I can show him how the Sound Scans are doing, it'll maybe push him over the edge to give this band a shot at some shows." I looked at him and said, "Well, is there anything about that that seems fucked up to you?" And he looked at me, bemused, and said, "Um, no, not really, why?" [laughs] I said, "Well, let me put it this way, if the band that you're talking about, if you gave me a copy of their record and I thought it was fucking awesome, then I don't care if they sold two demos to their friends in the basement, I would take that band on tour around the world." That's

the difference between operating in a way that's autonomous and independent versus acting in a way that's simply mimicking a system of business that doesn't work.

**That's like Steve Albini's criticism that we're just creating "our version of the scumbags."**

Exactly. I feel like we're modeling our business and ideas of how to promote a record around a system that 1) wasn't created for the bands and 2) was created for a bunch of people who don't give a fuck about music. I wasn't naïve to that even when we signed to Capitol. I knew a lot of these things; I know a lot more now. But again, that's why I can't criticize. I feel like it's very important to kind of draw a line in the sand or at least make these things vocal. At least say, "Don't you think that's fucked up?" That's what I kind of feel like saying these past six months—"don't you feel that's fucked up" has been my mantra to every single person I meet! [laughs]

**I think it's easy to make generalizations, but it's hard to break down. It's sort of like saying, "OK, I'll go climb Mount Everest." That's an overwhelming goal, so you have to break it down into manageable steps. Maybe that's behind the complacency; changing it seems futile or overwhelming.**

From my vantage point right now, I feel like the important thing is to start the discussion, and I feel like I've been doing that with every person that I've met on tour. I've been saying, "Hey, where do you stand? What do you think about all this?" Because it is a discussion. The most that I can do is 1) discuss it with the other bands and 2) discuss it with the actual kids that go out and talk to people at the shows. It goes back to what punk always was. It was this undercurrent and groundswell of thoughtfulness that just existed—it never happened overnight. ¶ But I think more important is actually *do* these things, to actually set precedent, to actually externally say "I believe this," regardless of whether or not it upsets your friends.

**You have the lyrics "I never want to say my best days are behind me" on stickers and T-shirts. It seems like almost a thesis statement for the band.**

When we were first talking about the sequencing for the album, we had a lot of different ideas about what the first song on the album would be, but I felt really strongly that "Lukewarm" should be the first song on the album because it was almost an anthem for us. To me, when I first heard the lyrics to that song, I said, "This is what it's about." It's about being able to exist as adults with an alternative way of thinking, not just becoming one of "them" by accepting defeat. Nobody in this band is young anymore. I feel like it's important to just be out there in the same way a band like Fugazi or Superchunk or whoever still inspires me to be. That kind of stuff creates a legacy that is important and needs to be recognized.

And emulated, I think.

I totally agree. Burning Airlines is also a total inspiration.

Again, another group of people coming from a position of having "been there."

And Jets to Brazil. We're talking about bands that, to us are peers. We've been through a lot of the same stuff. We understand now—we've got the hindsight, we've got the perspective. I feel like those two bands are doing so well and so good that it's practically a neon sign that says, "Hey, you don't have to do it *that* way. You can do it *this* way." ¶ A pretty common thing you hear with older bands is, "Well, we're not 19 anymore. We don't live at our parents' house anymore." Those are valid points to make during certain arguments, but when it comes to whether or not that argument has something to do with how you treat the relationship between the art you make the "product" you sell, then I think that's where I have the issue.

You've talked before about the dignity in having a day job, which could be tied to that.

I think that Texas started to make a lot of bad decisions when we started to become way too financially dependent on the band. Say you're 28, and you sign a major-label deal. Let's say you get a bidding-war style advance. You're still talking about a basic office-job salary for a couple of years until you get dropped. Then you've got nothing and you'll never see a royalty from any of

your records on a major label. Now I'm on Jade Tree, and I have a day job. And let's say we make two or three records for Jade Tree, and they do pretty decent. Jade Tree doesn't spend a million dollars on the marketing of records. Generally bands recoup after 4,000 or 5,000 copies of a record, which sounds like a lot to some people and to smaller labels it is, but they generally can sell 4,000 to 5,000 copies of a record. Everything after that, you're making royalties. Now let's say the band breaks up in two years. You're 30 years old, and now you've still got a day job, so you have that security, but you've also got that added income from royalties coming every six months just because you signed to an independent label. ¶ Now there's always

understand. I understand what it means to be in a band in your late 20s and early 30s. Ultimately what it all comes down to is a handful of people that I've seen survive it have all done it with integrity, and that's how I want to survive it.

But the question is if you want this to be something that can be sustained, you can't turn your back on this. It's not something you can turn around in five minutes and change your mind about.

The things we've been talking about today aren't things that I'm wishy-washy about. These are ideas that I just feel strongly attached to even before I knew what all these things meant within the context of a punk scene. It's a gut feeling that some-



## I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT THAT PEOPLE SEE PUNK AS A COMMUNITY—MORE LIKE AN ETHICAL INSTITUTION THAN A SOUND.

a chance that you could sign to a major label and strike it rich. I have friends that are millionaires because of major labels. That's great, but out of everybody that I know—dozens and dozens of people that I'm friends with that have gone through the major-label route—two of them are millionaires. So if that's the kind of gamble you want to take with your band, go for it. I'm not going to stop you, and I totally

thing is wrong. That's existed since you were a little kid—you can never really contradict a gut feeling. I think that's the ultimate thing is that living in a climate where everything's cool, and everything's great, and "I don't want to upset anybody" has kind of led us to this existence of meaningless music, and if my gut says this is wrong, then I don't want to be afraid to say it. ☺

You see this happening in the music industry at the moment: you can be Courtney Love or Britney Spears, but you're going to have to battle against people's prejudices to be anything else.

On the back cover of the Le Tigre's album *Feminist Sweepstakes*, there are sundry cool and useful items: a spray-painted skateboard, a cupcake, a photocopy machine, headphones, scissors, some keyboards, a Tribe 8 cassette, glue, and an Electrelane record. On the front, the three members are shown getting busy with scissors and paste in a style beloved of both insurrectionists and children's TV presenters the world over. Now, I'm no fancy-pants academic. I hold no truck with signifiers and find myself quite unable to dissect ongoing revolutions, but I do know the following:

Electrelane are a quartet from my hometown of Brighton, England. Their names are Verity, Emma, Rachel and Mia—the group having formed a few years back around the nucleus of Verity and Emma. Initially, someone informed me they sounded like Stereolab, only with a little of Thee Headcoatees thrown in, so of course I didn't bother to listen properly to their debut 7". More drone rock, more garage, I can always do without. Yet Electrelane's music is so accessible—pleasant and melodic, without losing any of the wariness, paranoia, or distrust that should be incorporated into all great rock music. Sure, the Farfisa organ recalled other Farfisas that went before. How couldn't it?

Electrelane are a band that creates music, quite hypnotic and (gasp) sweet—

ng in the music industry Courtney Love or Britney Spears have to battle against everything else.

swirls and cadences and minor keys and all the rest of it. They have definite pretensions towards being "artists", are pro-female—the dedication list on their album takes in a virtual Who's Who of popular iconographic alternative female culture—and almost certainly aren't satisfied with creating just music.

This is their interview. Half of it was conducted in person (Mia, Rachel). The other half was done by e-mail (Verity, the nominal band-leader, and Emma).

## Interview by Everett True

Photo by Andy Fallon

You seem obsessed with the concept of bad feminism.

Emma: "Bad feminism"? Do you mean that we think the world is sexist? It is.

Verity: I've never heard of the concept of "bad feminism" before. I guess you're a pretty bad feminist if you think that feminism is a "trend" that has had its day, which is the way that some so-called feminists are talking nowadays—as if all the work's been done. Feminism doesn't stop because middle-class Western women don't feel oppressed anymore. We need to keep being active and political. It's a way of looking at the world and saying "I won't accept your hand on my shoulder keeping

stry at the  
ey Spears,  
st people's

me down." I also disagree with the kind of feminism that views women as essentially all the same—one big homogenous group. It's a problem because the visible few get taken as representative of *all* women. ¶ You see this happening in the music industry at the moment: you can be Courtney Love or Britney Spears, but you're going to have to battle against people's prejudices to be anything else. In this way I think feminism nowadays is a part of a much wider struggle against the intolerance of difference and towards the acceptance of diversity in society.

Rachel: All extreme feminism is bad, to me. I'm grateful for what women were fighting for years ago because it doesn't exist anymore in my life. That means they have achieved a lot. If you look at yourself as equal to everyone else, you'll be treated as equal. I don't want to be classed as a feminist band. It's almost too predictable, passé, naff, to be thought of as that. If I was confronted by chauvinism, I'd fight it to the death, but I'm very rarely confronted with it. Occasionally, some 60-year-old guy at work will say something sexist and my hackles will go up . . . The only things that need to be fought for are other women in other



elect

trelane

## Seeing a band play on stage really going for it, it makes your heart go tight; makes you so excited.

countries still being downtrodden.

Women in bands can't complain about it, because just by doing what they're doing they've fought it and won it.

Mia: Do you not think we as a band have that problem?

Rachel: When have we been confronted with chauvinism?

Mia: As women, as a band . . .

Rachel: It's a shame the focus has to be on our sex. I'm so secure in my sex. I'm the ultimate feminist—I'm not downtrodden, never will be, and don't rely on a man for anything. That's more of a feminist than a typical one who isn't doing much for the female cause, just beating on about it. That's bad feminism.

Verity: Rachel is right. But there are also quite a few non-musicians who have expected only rubbish from us, which is a pretty common attitude towards women making rock music.

**What was your motivation when you started—who made you first want to play an instrument on stage?**

Emma: Just listening to my mum's record collection. I would always be by the stereo when I was little, playing records or just looking at the covers. I always wanted to be in a band. Verity made me want to get up on stage. I never thought I would actually do it. I get really bad nerves before we play. It's probably about the worst thing I could imagine myself doing.

Verity: I play the saxophone and I used to want to be in a jazz band. So people like Charlie Parker and John Coltrane first made me want to play in a band on stage. But then I met Emma and she got me listening to things like My Bloody Valentine and The Velvet Underground and we decided to start a rock 'n' roll band.

Mia: A definite defining moment was when I went to a gig, saw this band on stage and knew I wanted to do it more than anything else. I was 15. I bought a guitar the next day.

But why play rock? Why not become a mainstream pop band?

Mia: It doesn't make you feel the same.

The feeling is so absolutely different.

Seeing a band play on stage really going for it, it makes your heart go tight; makes you so excited. But I am satisfied watching it, which is why I want to be a music journalist as well. The first record I bought was Tracey Chapman when I was about seven. That opened my eyes. It's not as it may seem though . . . I bought Kylie Minogue at the same time.

Rachel: I was watching bands for about 10 years before I joined Electrelane. I found the band scene very exciting. All my friends were in bands. I started to learn the guitar, and had an opportunity to buy a bass really cheap, someone was going to teach me, and I was asked to join Electrelane. It just happened. I was happy just going to gigs. I bought *The Beatles Complete*, Simon & Garfunkel, and tried their songs. I used to listen to classic rock like Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath, Pink Floyd—'70s rock.

**Electrelane doesn't sound like any of those bands.**

Rachel: I am open to all music. There's no music I hate, apart from Country & Western. I like "Jolene," but I hate voices that warble, so maybe that's why.

Mia: I like country, but I hate reggae. But that's ignorance talking.

**What comprises punk rock to you?**

Rachel: Not conforming. Whatever you write is because you want to write it. It's about not worrying how it will be interpreted by anyone else.

Mia: It's obviously more a frame of mind than a style of music. I'd say what we are doing is punk. Not the music, but the *way* we're doing it. Because we're doing exactly what we want to be doing . . .

**But probably the kids from N'Sync and Pop Idol are doing precisely what they want to do, as are The Stereophonics and Roger Waters . . .**

Emma: Yeah, but for them doing exactly what they want to do is *easy*, because they're fucking loaded.

Mia: They may be doing what they want, but they're not doing it *themselves*. They're being pushed around like lambs.

Rachel: They're a package—it's more like stage school. Why isn't Roger Waters considered punk rock now? He was in the early days.

**Why do you think people use punk as a yardstick? It seems like Rolling Stones fans in the '60s boasting about how into swing they are.**

Emma: People love punk. That's why they always fish for comparisons.

Verity: People are afraid to move on. It's so easy to accept that *now* is complete shit and keep looking back to when it was really cool. But what is going on is that now is going to be shit unless people get a bit more motivated to make things happen.

**So then what's your motivation?**

Rachel: I don't know. There's always a carrot ahead. There's always something exciting down the road that could be down the road—playing in another country . . .

Emma: To write an album that we all like; to work with Steve Albini; to tour a lot and play in different places. I want to get the label going properly, and start releasing other people as soon as we can. There's a new band in San Francisco, at the moment they are called HOTT, but they're changing it, I think. They are amazing—three girls and two keyboards. I can't even describe how good they are. I want to get their record out.

Verity: Going to Berlin to write our next album.

Mia: I think it's simple. I feel I'm doing something good. I'm enjoying it. It's a fucking great way to earn a living. It doesn't matter how nervous I am, I'd much rather be on stage playing a gig. I just love it. ☺

and a benefit that will stay with me.  
art of the future. I have had many  
years of benefit, and I believe it's time  
for me to give back. I am happy to do  
what I can to help others.

Now, I am not perfect. I have made  
many mistakes. But I have learned from  
them and I am trying to be better.  
I am a punk rock fan, and I love the  
music and the culture. I want to share  
that with others. I hope that by doing  
this, I can make a difference in someone's  
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**T**hroughout the latter half of the 20th century, Latin America has been largely divided between a struggle for self determination and repressive authoritarian governments working in cahoots with the US Military and the CIA. In the name of ridding the Western Hemisphere of Soviet influence, the United States helped sponsor the killing of thousands. Many of those who lost their lives in the ensuing bloodshed knew little of political ideologies being battled over or why their attempts at the redistribution of land were considered contrary to democracy by Washington.

Out of this world of near-constant turmoil and endless conflict there grew a movement committed to non-violent solutions. In 1968, a conference in Uruguay was held in an

attempt to organize the non-violent elements of political opposition throughout Latin America. The group became known as Servicio Paz y Justicia (The Service for Peace and Justice) and in 1974 appointed Adolfo Perez Esquivel the Secretary-General.

In 1976, Perez Esquivel initiated a campaign to establish a United Nations Human Rights Commission to draw attention to the atrocities and mass "disappearances" committed by the Argentine Military throughout the 1970s. The following year he was imprisoned without cause.

Awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1980 for his work to bring attention to the human rights violations committed within Argentina, Adolfo Perez Esquivel has organized to make non-violent resistance to oppression a more viable form of social protest. As he explains, "non-violence is an act of resistance through which we seek to create a new society where the power relations are different than they are today."

Just two days after Perez delivered a statement signed by eight Nobel Laureates to the United Nations denouncing the United States' declaration of war upon terrorism, I caught up with him at the University of San Francisco.

Interview by **George B. Sanchez**

To begin, it's hard to find material on your background. I'm curious: You were a professor of architecture in Buenos Aires, but in 1974 you stopped doing that to work on the coordination of non-violent action in Latin America. What led to this decision and this philosophy?

Part of the process is that decisions like this are not usually made overnight but reflect a process of coming to that point and making that kind of decision. There were people with whom I stayed in contact who were involved in non-violent action. Some of these people had begun to work in 1962, contacting groups and people throughout Latin America who were interested in non-violent action, many from a Christian faith perspective. That's how the work began to form a network of these people and groups. ¶ I can mention some of the people, not all of them, but some of the people who played a key role in bringing about the change in my life. Two of these people were an Austrian woman, Dr. Hildegard Goss-Mayr and her husband Jean Goss. Another person who I was in constant contact with, who had been a disciple of Mahatma Ghandi, was Lanza Del Vasto. He participated in the marches and mass mobilizations during the liberation of India. Another person from India who was also a disciple of Mahatma Ghandi, Debbie Prasad, was also important. ¶ On the basis of my experiences and these relationships, I began to reflect more upon the reality of Latin America, it was

**We, in a sense, become human beings,**

**ALDOLOFO PEREZ  
ESQUIVEL**

then that in 1974 I began to help organize, structure, and help consolidate this network of contacts and people that had been developing over the years through out the region.

I'm curious of the development of non-violence in Latin America because the Latin American struggle seems particularly cornerstoned in armed struggle. How did a non-violent philosophy spread? Was it popular at first? Even Rigoberta Menchu Tum initially took up arms in the struggle against the government of Guatemala.

Perhaps armed struggle in Latin America has had a lot more publicity. Violence has been much more known, but there has always been a lot of non-violent struggle and much non-violent action throughout the different communities and in the face of different conflicts. That's why we say that as we share a common of goal of liberation—there are very different paths.

**Understanding the struggle and the movement in light of publicity, what do you view as the role of the media in struggles against globalism and for human rights?**

If you look at what's happening right now in relation to the war in Afghanistan, all of the media is in a sense developing a war psychosis and promoting a war psychosis. It seems all the attention is focused on war and efforts to make war and not much attention has been given to efforts to make peace. The mass media—the big medium, the big means of communication—are all corporately held and they respond to corporate instinct. They respond to interests of the system. They reflect that in the news and in the focus they bring to the news. Those corporate interests are not necessarily in the interest of peace and the interest

where we have more confidence. Where we see that our voice can be heard.

**Talking about the difference between alternative media and mainstream media, something that you mentioned yesterday was the notion that globalism begins with a single mindset, which is fostered by the mainstream media. What does it mean to break out of that mindset?**

The uniform mindset refers to the dominant way of thinking. That is something that comes about when, or results when, people lose the capacity to think for themselves. For each of us, our capacity to think for ourselves is based, in a sense, on our capacity to know and to cultivate our own identity. That's why uniform thinking—uniform mindset—can destroy history, destroy people's memory, both individual memory and collective memory. Our ability to act in the present is based on our notion of who we are and where we come from—a notion of the past. If that power is destroyed, then it becomes impossible to act individually and act responsibly. To break through this uniform mindset, what we have to do is to develop our own critical thinking—our capacity to think critically about ourselves. This means developing our own identity. This means recovering and strengthening our culture, our own spirituality, and developing a notion of each person—each people—of each culture and gaining the capacity to have our own perspective on the basis of who we are. In order to do that, what we have to seek to do is to awaken in more people a critical awareness. So people are not dominated by this kind of uniformed thinking.

**The notion of that is interesting and I understand the importance of critical consciousness and an assessment of culture in that manner,**

outside of that setting . Critical consciousness—the rational capacity of thought—can be developed among all kinds of people from all walks of life. Information and knowledge is one thing. Something else quite different is being able to think critically. In Latin America, there is much critical consciousness over the situation of life in the pueblos. The indigenous, the popular sector, workers, the poor; all are conscious and aware of their situation and the domination they are under and that's why so many people in so many sectors of the population are engaged in the struggle for alternatives because that critical consciousness exists.

**In your talk yesterday, you said something that really struck me. You said, "When we hear music, we first have to hear the silence. We can't hear the music without the silence—it's part of the music. We have to listen to the inner silence." From your perspective, what can the silence teach us, and more importantly, why do we not listen to that silence?**

We are numbed by uniformed thinking. I think we don't listen to it because we hear so much noise. We are bombarded by so much noise, from and by this uniform mindset that it becomes very difficult for us to hear that silence. We never have the time to listen to ourselves or we are afraid to listen to ourselves because we don't want to recognize what we really are. We have to free ourselves. When we are able to let go of everything that is external, that which has conditioned us, we will be able to know *who* we are and *what* we are. The music is not just made up of sound. Music is a combination of sound and silence. Without silence, music would not exist.

**Yesterday you said "We call ourselves human beings but we really aren't there yet."**

## real human beings—in the moment in which we agree to recognize others as human beings.



of human rights or the interests of common people. ¶ As part of the liberation struggle and the struggle for human rights against corporate globalization, the importance of alternative media becomes very critical. There is no free press; there is only freedom for business and free enterprise. The free press, in a sense that we have it, is what is really provided by alternative means of communication. That is, in a sense,

but from a Latin American perspective, how do you think we'll fall upon that? I think people tend to believe that a college education will lead to that, but speaking as a college graduate from a liberal arts school, that's not always the case. What other avenues can we find that in?

University graduates don't have critical consciousness—in fact it might be easier to work

We, in a sense, become human beings, *real* human beings—in the moment in which we agree to recognize others as human beings. In the process of how we define what is and isn't the light—the light of life—we find what the reason is for living, for being. Wisdom is not something which belongs to the person who reads the most books. Wisdom rests with those who have the capacity to really understand the meaning of life. ☺

I'm sitting in Valentine's, a bar/venue in upstate Albany, waiting (translation: pounding beers) for Hot Water Music. It's not a very inviting place, but for the crowd gathering tonight to see a punk rock show, that's part of the appeal. It's dark and seedy and, I'm told, has a Grateful Dead cover band play every Wednesday night.

Finally after a few glasses, the first of the band members comes down to talk. As I find out in the next few days, getting the band together at one time is neigh impossible—except for at mealtimes.

To say the band is busy would be an understatement. They've been together for seven years, released six studio albums (their newest, the scorching *A Flight And A Crash*), a live album and a slew of singles and EP's. The band rose slowly from the obscure basements of Gainesville, Florida to mass recognition, critical acclaim, and larger venues. Hot Water Music has lived the storybook DIY existence—but without the sellout ending.

Interview by Arye Dworken

Photos by Shawn Scallen

## Part One: Chuck Ragan

Chuck Ragan is a wonderfully approachable person—although you wouldn't know it by looking at him. He has the hardened aesthetic of a lumberjack, with his beard and flannel shirt. He likes to drink beer and "build stuff" with his hands. He is the man's man. But get past the exterior, and you discover that Chuck is downright goofy and also happens to be the only Hot Water Music member that's married. Is this the same man that sang "Come and get some, motherfucker"? Naaah.

Eventually they released their album and they called themselves "Hot Water." We won, fuckers. There's also a jazz band called "Hot Water Music" in Alabama.

### Why is the name so common?

It's a Charles Bukowski short story book. The story meant nothing to our sound which was sort of the point—we didn't want anyone judging us by our name, we just wanted to be as ambiguous as we could. We had a show and we needed a name quickly for a flyer and Bukowski was twisted and we were all pretty twisted

### What was that first show?

Dirty Nelly's, an Irish pub in Gainesville. A lot of our friends work there now.

**OK, forget the band for a minute . . . I want to talk about your personal life. What do you love doing besides being in a band?**

I love to build shit. I love carpentry and working with my hands. I want to build acoustic guitars—just build a beautiful guitar like Eddie Van Halen. Then use them, because there's no satisfaction like using something that you've built.

**You seem to have other things in your life besides being in this band, like your passion for building and your wife, who you met . . .**

. . . in Gainesville. It's a really sappy love story. The first time I saw her it was love at first sight. I was walking by this theater and heard this captivating angelic voice and I

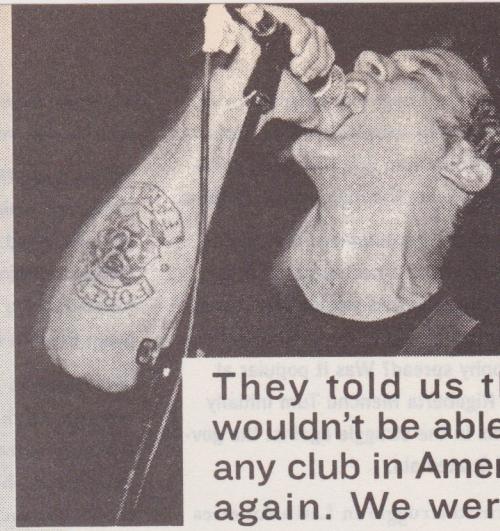
**They told us that we wouldn't be able to play any club in America ever again. We were like, "You're not even going to find the places we play! You gonna show up to Billy's basement in Birmingham, Alabama?"**

was like "Whoa." I didn't have any money to get in, so I walked up to the side of the building where they kept the garbage cans and I climbed on the cans.

I looked inside the window and saw this chick wailing on an acoustic guitar—it was absolutely gorgeous—playing her heart out for four people, including the bartender. She was this crazy tattooed punk rock girl, but she was wearing this elaborate white prom dress. There was this one red light shining on her—it was scene straight out of a movie. ¶ I didn't go in and I thought I would never see her again, but I went to this bar once and she fucking worked there. The first time we met, we hated each other. When I first spoke to her, I was pushing my band on her like "Hey, I'm in this band." She works in a punk bar—like she's never heard that line before. But I was persistent, we hung out a lot and eventually we wound up dating for three years.

### How does a punk rocker propose?

We were both sleeping on a roof under the stars, both of us in a sleeping bag. I just proposed to her, straight out. It took a lot of balls, more than getting out on stage. Incidentally, if I was listening to this story I would probably be gagging. [laughs] ☺



**Tell me about your run-in with a major label—it was over the name of your band, right?**

It was with a court battle. This label was putting out music by a band called "Hot Water Music." If you look on our album *Forever and Counting*, you'll notice that we avoided the lawsuit by calling ourselves "The Hot Water Music Band." We just added the "the" and "band"—pretty smart, huh? ¶ The label offered us money—like \$16,000—and major label hook-ups if we changed our name. But we were not taking them seriously. Supposedly, this other Hot Water Music couldn't release until we compromised. They raised the amount to \$30,000. We still said "no." I'm not sure why—we were *true* dumb asses, I guess. [laughs] They told us that we wouldn't be able to play any club in America ever again. We were like, "You're not even going to find the places we play! You gonna show up to Billy's basement in Birmingham, Alabama?" This went on for a while. ¶

## Part Two: George Rebelo



George is the shy one. But I enjoy conversing with him in his soft-spoken demur about country music and his dream to be a session musician (he's wanted to be a drummer since he was five). Watching George Rebelo play the drums is like watching Animal Planet: ferocious, unforgiving, relentless, bloody as hell. It's as if the drums had just made fun of George's mother and he took it personally. We take a walk outside the Mass Art Gym in the cold, bitter Boston winter. I'm wearing a hat to preserve almost 80% of my body heat. George, on the other hand, wears nothing on his head in risk of ruining his finely crafted hairstyle. A drummer's gotta' look good!

I hate these tape recorders...

Sorry, I just don't write that quickly. How long have you been together?

Seven years from the beginning. All original members. I was in a high school jazz band when we all met.

You like jazz? What do you listen to?

I love bebop—specifically stuff like Charlie Parker. I haven't been paying homage to jazz as much as I used to.

So can I assume you weren't hanging out with these guys at Circle Jerks and 7 Seconds shows?

No way, man. I was going to Iron Maiden concerts! I was a total metal head. *Piece of*

*Mind* was my favorite album. I saw them at the Providence Civic Center when I was nine years old and it blew my mind. Granted, I was also only nine at the time. I used to listen to Anthrax and Metallica—anything that was on *Headbangers Ball*.

Obviously being on the road interferes with your personal life. Do you ever resent it?

It is a little rough. I haven't always been mentally ready for it. We've been on the road for six years and it gets hard. It's impossible to have a relationship. Hell, I haven't had a girlfriend in two years. You get into town and you meet someone you might like and you don't have the time get to know her. When are you going to see her? Like, two months from now? I see how hard it is for Chuck to be married . . .

. stability is hard. I miss on occasion being grounded. Sometimes, I don't even know where I am.

These guys are like my brothers. You get into a fight with your brothers, you still want to be with them.

Sometimes, I don't get enough sleep and sometimes I get too much sleep.

That must get tiring. Do you see this band going on for much longer?

Yeah. We've been through so much already. We've already broken up once, in Germany—we were touring too much and getting on each others' nerves. Despite the fact that we broke up, we would still get together and play pool. So we figured, "Why not keep doing this?" These guys are like my brothers. You get into a fight with your brothers, you still want to be with them. ¶ Another reason to stay in this band is the kids. Two days ago, a kid came over to me and said our band saved his life. That's powerful.

Well, I'm sure in this close knit scene, you've heard that many times before. I know this may sound cold, but don't you get tired of that?

No, because I was that kid at one time. I went over to bands and said the same thing. I may forget about the bands that were appreciative of my coming over, but I will never forget those that shunned me. ☺



HOT WATER MUSIC

# Part Three: Chris Wppard

Chris sits alone on the bleachers of the Mass Art Gym, the site of the show they will be playing for an expected 800 kids. He is reading a book while everyone else is playing basketball. He is also wearing glasses—he's my kind of nerd. Chris, who shares the role of lead singer and guitar player with Chuck, has a shredded talking-voice. It's as if he gave it all to punk rock and saved nothing for actual conversation. But within his gravelly whisper, there's a depth and an intensity the others have not shared with me.

## What makes a good show?

The energy and the dancing. If the energy is not there, then it's discouraging. We need to feed off the audience. We've been at shows where everyone's too cool to get into it. The smaller, out-of-town venues usually have more energy. But nothing is like playing in Gainesville.

## How much longer do you see the band going on?

It will take a lot for this to end. We've created this band from the ground up and we have raised it like a child. But there is this love/hate relationship, though. I do love it, but I don't have that much time to see my son.

## You have a son?

Yep, Gary Lee. He's five and a half now. He lives in Birmingham with his mom. For such a youngster, he's really into it. He's been to shows and he loves it. If I didn't do this, I would look like a sell out to him. The only reason I'm not with him now is because of Hot Water Music. I get to see the world and learn new things, meet new people, and if I didn't have passion while doing this, it would be selfish of me not to be with him.

## Is that a Black Flag tattoo on your arm?

Yeah, I really loved hardcore. I got into Black Flag because of a school suspension. I was suspended with a kid named Brad—he had shaved head, Docs . . . he was the real deal. He made me tapes and brought me to shows. I never knew anything like that before. I grew up before that listening to the Stones.

So without Brad, you probably wouldn't be here.

Yeah, that's absolutely true. Brad has a lot to do with it.

It's a long way from there to here. Interestingly, you're now in a position to change others with your own music in much the way that Brad's influence changed you. Do you write your songs with listeners in mind?

Truth be told, we never had a definitive goal in mind—we just went out and did what felt right. I see song writing as therapy. I *need* this. I don't sit down write a song to help someone else. It's more like, I'm having this problem now and I need to write it down and try to work out an answer for myself. Or if I have a fuckin' great day and I need to remember it, I'll write a song about it. Songs are my journals.

When you play the songs that are associated with specific memories, like the negative ones, do you find that playing them live will conjure up those unfortunate circumstances? Is it difficult to play them before an audience and share this deeply personal part of you before a crowd?

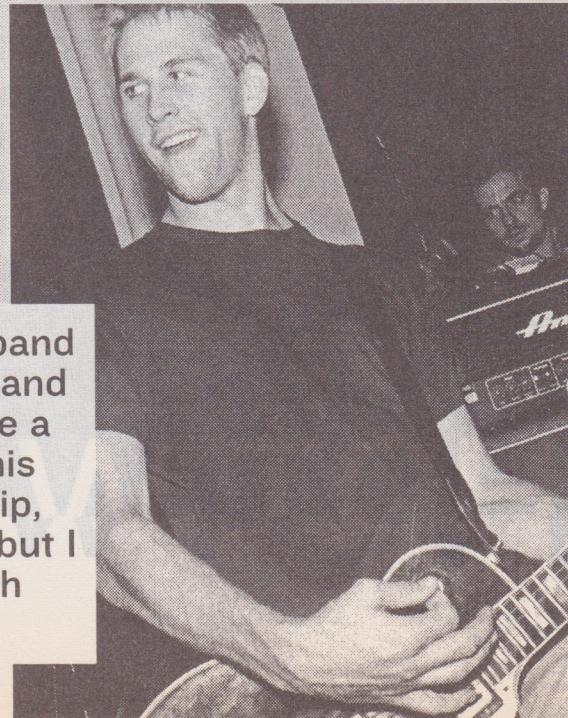
Absolutely not. But we will only play songs that are relevant to us. A lot of bands will play their hits at every show—Sting will play "Roxanne" forever. Well, we don't really have hits, but we will only play the songs that still

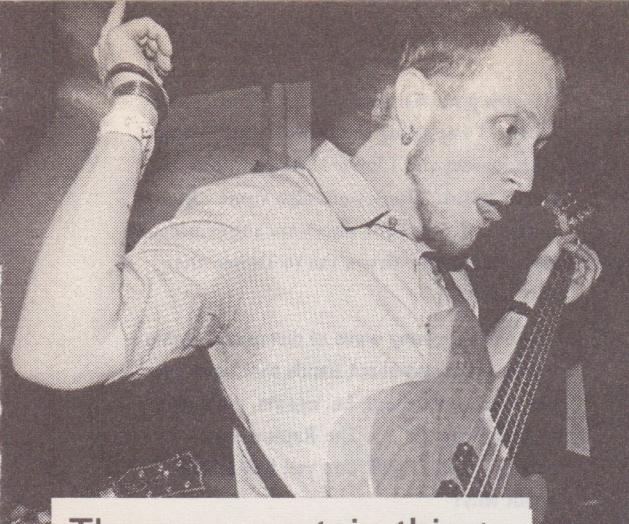
We've created this band from the ground up and we have raised it like a child. But there is this love/hate relationship, though. I do love it, but I don't have that much time to see my son.

feel alive to us. People ask us to play "Eating the Filler" and we used to play it all the time. But after a couple of years, we just didn't feel it anymore. The song is just not me. Once someone says that, it's over. If you're playing that song after it's meaningless, then you're acting. You're lying to everyone.

So if you're playing for yourself, where does the audience fit in? Are they a factor, as well?

Yeah, of course. The fact that someone will come out and see us and dig it makes me want to tour my heart out. But also if our music helps people out, then that, in exchange, helps me to write more. ¶ They say it's easier to talk to complete strangers and writing a song is talking to a stranger. It's like sitting in a bar and talking and in two hours they know everything about you. If you look hard enough in the songs, you will know me. I pour myself out to them because there's less of a risk. It's not too close to home. ¶ But on a deeper level, I need to keep writing because they're so many fucked up things going on in my life. I understand that being in this band is conducive to tumultuous inner-conflicts. Sometimes it's a spider web of a mess. But I can never walk away from this. I need to resolve all of this and persevere. ☺





**There are certain things that we don't want to do. Bigger labels make you do things you don't want to do. We won't tour with bands we don't agree with politically. Besides doing the Warped Tour, we won't compromise. We like the small, dirty, punk clubs. We did a tour this past summer called the "Reality Check Tour" where we played small venues to keep things in perspective. That's when we enjoy ourselves the most.**

**S**o, you're the youngest but you're the one who takes care of everything. How'd you get that role?

It just sort of happened. I think if I wasn't doing it, it would not get done. There was a time when everyone had their own individual chores, but I would just wind up doing them anyway. Because I will go nuts if they're not taken care of. I get a bit obsessive. That's why I couldn't work in an office—I don't care about that. I had an office job at the University of Florida Publishing but I hated it because these

people did not care about what they were doing. They were putting out these books that just were not interesting. But thankfully, we're doing well enough that we all finally quit our jobs last year. Up to that point, we needed an outside income.

**When did you finally say, "This is it, we are a band"?**

When we started worrying whether people liked us or not. When you start worrying, then it's for real.

**How do you stay idealistic and fight the temptation of toning down into a pop-punk band?**

Oh, it's been tempting—trust me here. I just think we're too stupid to know any better. I mean, we're touring with Rival Schools who is on Island Records and they have a tour bus. We have a fucking maroon van. I used to get frustrated because a lot of NY hardcore bands were popping up on major

labels. But as I get older, I realize vicariously through Walter [Schreifels] that being on a major is hard. This is his third band and he's starting from the bottom again. Seeing him start again is inspiring. ¶ We've also toured with Alkaline Trio and Saves the Day right before they blew up and sometimes we're like, "How the fuck did that happen?" Sometimes, I'm like, "What are we doing wrong?" And then, I remember that there are hundreds of kids who would want to be in a band like ours. So I'm grateful.

**How does hearing about bands like Saves the Day breaking into the *Billboard* 100 make you feel?**

For real? I'm super-psyched for them. Because I see what they go through. There are certain things that we don't want to do. Bigger labels make you do things you don't want to do. We won't tour with bands we don't agree with politically. Besides doing the Warped Tour, we won't compromise. We like the small, dirty, punk clubs. We did a tour this past summer called the "Reality Check Tour" where we played small venues to keep things in perspective. That's when we enjoy ourselves the most. ¶ But I'm glad that we went through all the shit we've gone through. I think where if it did happen—the big mass embrace—we could deal with it healthily. Although, if everything went smoothly, we wouldn't know what to do with ourselves—it would so be out of the norm.

**Is the punk scene today like watching *Total Request Live*? Sometimes it feels like that to me.**

Yeah, it has in a way. I mean, punk has bled over into the mainstream with Blink 182 and Sum41. I'm not dissing them or anything, but if the kids need the substance, that's what we're good for. Did that sound condescending?

**There's a lot of talk about you guys relaxing for a few months.**

Yeah, the plan is to not do anything until October. We're working on a new album now which will be out in mid-September. So, there will be some well-deserved R&R. We need the down time. We need to realize that it's not about spreading the word anymore—it's about plateauing and perpetuating the name. I'm ready to go home. After all, we're only human. ☺

## Part Four: Jason Black

Jason smokes Parliament Lights. Jason seems pretty anal. Jason plays a killer bass. Jason's blonde hair is receding a bit. These are all observations I had from watching him for a few days. I don't get a chance to speak with him until the hour before the Mass Art show. At first, I thought he was being a prick, avoiding me at all costs, even staying in the van reading Anne Rice trash when everyone was in Denny's. But in reality, Jason is a really likable guy burdened with the responsibility of being the only responsible one in the band.



**T**hree or four years ago, I first heard about The Rapture from people in Seattle who described them along the lines of "the weird goth band that signed to Sub Pop." They moved, here, there, everywhere, eventually winding up in NYC. With records released by Insound, Gravity, and most recently Sub Pop (although they're no longer on the label), The Rapture have made a name for themselves as a gleaming beacon of light in the burgeoning post-punk, no wave rock and roll scene that's remained the face of tomorrow since the days of the VSS.

When I saw The Rapture at Chicago's Fireside Bowl, they played like the most lopsided death disco band ever. I never wanted it to stop. Plus, they played a PIL cover that can't be beat because it sounds a lot like the original.

The following interview was conducted with bassist Matty Safer.

Interview by Jessica Hopper

**The Rapture's sound has dramatically progressed over the last few years. Was the evolution process simply a bi-product of age, evolving skills, tastes, and lineup kind of thing or is this the speed of the creative process in your band?**

It's a little bit difficult for me to answer that question completely since I wasn't in the band until we all moved to New York. But the two years I've been in the band have seen some pretty dramatic changes. The most obvious one is that the band no longer has a keyboard player. Beyond that, just because of our different experiences and backgrounds, no matter how much we try and nail down a specific influence or direction, we're all going to approach it differently, and it all kind of blends together. Luke and Vito have known each other since they were 11, and been playing together for years, so they were initially a lot more together musically than I was with either of them. As we played together longer, and as I became more incorporated into the lineup, my own influence and songwriting started to come into the picture, and affected the sound that way too.

**When you first started playing music, how old were you? What made you want to be a part of the underground?**

I started playing bass in the middle school band when I was about 12. I was initially a piano player, but I was terrible. I decided to switch to another instrument, either drums or bass. I wasn't sure which to play, so I asked the teacher what he thought. I went to a really small school—there were only three people in the band. The band already had a drummer but no bass player, so he told me to play bass. ¶ In terms of why I started playing in bands, for me it was Nirvana. I really loved them. After I read the Michael Azzerad book *Come as You Are* and learned about the bands they were into, like Flipper, the Melvins, and Sonic Youth—even Shonen Knife—I went down to the local record store and started trying to check some of it out. ¶ Through that, I figured out that in town there were punk bands playing, and started trying to see them. I tried to go see Jawbox once and Fugazi another time, but my mom wouldn't let me go by myself. ¶ Eventually my friend David and I went and saw Frodus play, and I just kept going from there. I think for Luke and Vito it was pretty similar, but with San Diego instead of DC bands. Rocket from the Crypt, Fluf, Truman's Water—stuff like that.

**Nirvana was the band that changed your life, and made you want to play—from being a fan to wanting to participate? How old were you? Did you like music before that?**

Nirvana was the first band that I really flipped over and read books about. Prior to that it was pretty all over the place, mostly the radio . . . Digital Underground, BBD, Tony Toni Tone, that sort of thing. Me and my buddies rapped over the instrumental to that Chi Ali track "Age Ain't Nothin' But a Number" in the talent show. After that, I really got into nerd rock bands like the Dead Milkmen. Everybody has a weird cousin who was into the Dead Milkmen. I started playing in bands pretty early on, when I was 14. It really wasn't a huge stretch from playing in the Middle School band the year before, because even though they called it the jazz ensemble, at our concert we ended playing a Pearl Jam Song, a Breeders song, and a Stevie Ray

Vaughn jam. As soon as high school started and I was going to shows, I just started asking everyone I knew if they wanted to start a band. There were also some older punks in the school who were super nice, made me tapes, drove me to shows, that sort of thing.

**There is a growing wave of discussion within the underground about bands that have people working for them, i.e. agents, managers, labels, publicists . . . The Rapture has a booking agent, right? Can you talk a little about why?**

Yeah, we have a booking agent. It's never really been much of an ethical issue for me. It really depends on your goals as an artist. I'd like to reach the broadest audience possible and get my music into the ears of a wide variety of listeners. Having an agent makes sure that we have the money necessary to stay on the road without having to worry as much about problems with the van, or eating, or being homeless when we get back from tour. It also allows us to focus more on music and less on music business things like calling promoters or writers in each town. ¶ When I was first starting to go to shows, I was about a thousand times more likely to know who was playing if it was at a club with a promoter that got listings in the paper, than I would have from flyers advertising basement shows. I missed out on seeing a lot of really cool stuff because of that sort of exclusivity. I'm not saying that everyone should have a booking agent or a publicist. It really depends on your goals. I think that, in independent music for the most part, with varying levels of success or ethics, the agents and managers are just a response to that desire. It's not like a boy band situation, where managers are going out there and scouting musicians to put together the most marketable product that they can. Even on a major level, at least with the bands I care about, I don't think that is happening. No label wizard put together Radiohead or the Neptunes or The Strokes, not to mention the smaller bands you've never heard of. It's generally a lot more organic than that, and it's pretty to write those bands off for something that has nothing to do with their music.

A black and white photograph of three young men. In the foreground, a man with short, light-colored hair is looking directly at the camera. He is wearing a dark, button-down shirt. Behind him, another man with dark hair is partially visible, looking towards the left. To the right, a third man with dark hair is looking towards the camera. The background is dark and out of focus.

# the RAPTURE

Songs don't exist in a box. Just like philosophy or literature or painting, there's a historical context.

# the RAPTURE

No label wizard put together Radiohead or the Neptunes or The Strokes, not to mention the smaller bands you've never heard of.



Living in New York and being an artist—a musician—in the midst of war and divisive tragedy, do you feel a responsibility to react and express your sentiment? I ask because since September 11, I feel like it's very difficult to write.

I don't really feel comfortable using the band or the stage as a political mouthpiece. It's not that the two are unrelated, but I don't feel like the fact that I'm onstage performing music particularly qualifies me to speak on the subject any more than anyone in the audience. If anything, I think that doing so could be damaging to whatever particular side I might choose to speak out for. ¶ I read this book about the Haight-Ashbury scene in the mid-to-late '60s that talked about how the protest music movement ultimately damaged the anti-Vietnam movement pretty severely. In creating a cultural movement around these ideals, they allowed pro-war factions to move the argument away from ideas and into attacks on the lifestyle itself—drug use, free love etc. . . ¶ It's not that I don't think the issues are important, I just think trying to address them in that context tends to cheapen them. It leads to a lot of sloganeering and that sort of thing. Clearly, what's going on is going to affect the art we produce. Art is a reaction to and interpretation of one's environment, and it's pretty impossible—not to mention stupid—to try and shut out what's been going on.

Maybe a better question is what do you feel like your responsibility, as an artist, as a creative person, is?

My responsibilities as an artist are to myself, and the others I'm collaborating with. To be satisfied in what I'm doing and when working with other people, to give equally to them what I ask them to

give me. What that means, I suppose, is being true to my desires and artistic goals. With lyrics for example, if I want to write heartfelt love songs, or songs about the war, or nursery rhymes, I need to do that. To do anything else would be irresponsible. There may be times where political activism is the motive behind the music, but if so, it's going to come from within.

**Do you feel like there is radical or political element to your band? Did political notion factor into any of the reasons you were drawn to punk rock?**

In a song, right now, the best thing I can try to do is put myself and my personality across. That includes my ideals, my fractured philosophies, or whatever. Most of the songs I write are just about the way I relate to and react to the world. I think that there's something political in that in a not-so-overt way. I don't think I'd even be capable of writing *political* lyrics like Los Crudos could, because as much as I try and inform myself of what's going on around me, I think most issues are a lot more complex than one can really effectively communicate in a song. I try to live my life a certain way, not always successfully, and I write about my life and the lives of those around me, so it's political like that, you know?

**Is other music the only thing that motivates you to make music?**

No. It comes from life. Walking around and taking in the world. Sometimes a fight or a great night out or something like that can just inspire a song. Songs don't exist in a box. Just like philosophy or literature or painting, there's a historical context. To place one's songs in that context can help deepen the thinking behind it. To try and ignore that context is a little silly.

The new Rapture material that I have heard is really danceable. Is that a conscious effort? Do you feel much allegiance, musically, or otherwise with music outside of punk/guitar/post-punk stuff?

It's a conscious effort in the sense that we had these musicians whose music we loved and decided to try and figure out how to do what they do. Artists like the Happy Mondays, 808 State, New Order, Philadelphia Sound. Groups like Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes. So we sat down and listened and tried to learn how to put across the feel that that those bands produce. There's a lot of other influences that go into it too. We were also going out to clubs a bit when we were working on the last record, in order to see what effect, in that environment, different musical directions taken by the DJs have on an audience. ¶ In terms of the whole post-punk thing, I don't really feel much allegiance to it. While I genuinely admire and love certain bands like PIL or the Talking Heads, as a genre or musical direction, post-punk has never really been what I've aspired to, or even what I'm most attracted to. It's a description we tend to get plastered with, which I can understand, but it's a bit simplistic. It's something that tends to happen to young bands. Coldplay is written off as a Radiohead rip-off, who were written off as a U2 rip-off, who were written off as an Echo and the Bunnymen rip-off. As bands continue to play and release records, people can begin to evaluate them on their own terms, and ask questions like, "Do they write good songs?" Or, "Do they have good lyrics, or hooks?" Those, ultimately, are much more interesting questions than what records they may or may not own. ©

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# PUNK PLANET

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THE PUNK PLANET  
IS THE ID OF THE SYSTEM

**S**an Francisco is a strange place to feel affluent these days. With one of the highest unemployment rates in the country, businesses closing shop right and left, and rents dropping every week, the once fabled high-tech service industry capitol of the United States has within a matter of a year, turned into a ghost town. For a city that my brother in Miami once described as "the kind of place that you hear more cell phones ringing than car alarms going off," a strange din of slowly moving traffic and quiet sidewalk chatter has quietly taken over. In some respects, the new regime of sound seems more appropriate to the slower pace of life that has historically characterized cities like SF, whose mid-'90s music scene, stereotyped by the high speed beats of local trance and house producers, artistically mirrored the new flow of downtown capital.

Granted, economies always change, and the velocity that characterizes the specific pace of any region's productivity is always incredibly varied. Where one business might be booming, many others might be producing goods in a more down-tempo kind of manner. Under such conditions, when it comes to taking the temperature of current culture, it becomes incredibly important that one remain open to all the different voices which mirror the various ways in which artists interact with their own geographic experience of history. Enter the pages of San Francisco Magazine *XLR8R*, an internationally distributed, locally produced magazine whose roots are firmly planted in SF's more than decade-old independent electronic and hip-hop music cultures.

Featuring articles ranging from sarcastic send-ups of recent "cover boy" Aphex Twin to interviews with dub reggae legend Mad Professor and hip-hop poet Ursula Rucker, *XLR8R* is a highly intelligent condensation of the thoughts and interests of San Francisco's continually productive underground music

scene. What remains so refreshing about *XLR8R* is that after eight years of publication—like the city it comes out of—it feels like the magazine is still exploring its own identity, both in terms of its content and its future possibilities. Most importantly, in a period of economic decline and world war, the artistically eclectic and inclusive attitude that *XLR8R* devotes to its subject matter has this incredibly welcoming communal vibe that's really hard to shake because it's so quietly contrary to the spirit of the so-called times. If that's what affluence means today, I'm totally down with it.

This interview took place in a café on Divisadero Street with editors Andrew Smith, Ron Nachmann and Tomas Palermo.

Interview by Joel Schalit

I read the *Billboard* top 20 sales list for independent records for last week. It consisted of party jams compilations, three different "God Bless America" recordings, and a lot of "nu" metal and gangsta rap. The only stereotypical "indie" release, at least according to our definition of the term, was Fugazi's new album at #17. I looked at this list and asked myself, "Is this what we built?" That's 20 years of independent cultural progress right there! [laughs]

Andrew: It just goes to show you anybody can do it. [laughs]

Speaking of that, *XLR8R* started at a really interesting time which most Americans would not associate with the rise of electronic music. It was 1994, right?

Andrew: 1993. Tomas and Ron weren't with the magazine yet. When I started *XLR8R*, it was in Seattle, which was even more difficult because it was still during the "Seattle Years." Even in Seattle things had gotten overblown. It was too much. So in a way, there was already a backlash against it, and we were trying to improve things there. I tried that for a year, and then gave up. [laughs] ¶ I decided to go to San Francisco, where there were a lot of interesting things that were happening. There were a lot of magazines down there. It's a big city; there were some good clubs and venues. I

didn't have any sense that things would become larger, even though I knew that things in the UK generally hit America four or five years later. That's basically what happened. After the whole rave thing exploded there during the late '80s and early '90s, it started happening here in '93-'94 and still is to this day. But it has become a different animal.

Tomas: I remember when I was living in Los Angeles and writing for *Urb*, I was peripherally checking out electronic music parties. I was more involved with the reggae and hip-hop scenes. But I was also getting into dance music. I remember that I would take trips to San Francisco on a bi-annual basis or two or three times a year and I'd always be amazed by the flyers and the sheer amount of parties that were happening, most of which were illegal warehouse parties. ¶ There really was a lot of innocence and passion and idealism surrounding that music and that scene. Specifically the semantics of how one threw a party back then. You had to have an enormous, killer sound system with lots of wattage—so much to the point that you would specify the wattage of your party on the flyer. Even above the DJ name, like "50,000 Watts of Turbo Sound," that kinda thing. Those days were pretty radical in their own right because people were finding beat up warehouse spaces, rigging up sound systems, and going for it. You could get away with a lot more back in those days because the police didn't have a clue. Whereas now you can't get away with this stuff these days unless it's police sanctioned.

You have to get a permit, right?

Tomas: You have to get a number of permits. You actually have to hire police, paramedics, and off-duty firemen to work at your event.

That's an interesting way of implicating the counterculture with the establishment. It sounds very uncomfortable.

Andrew: People were coming up from San Francisco to do events. But the way that it started—with what rave was back then—was people rebelling against popular music, popular, established dress codes, even rebelling against the police and against copyright, where the next track always had to be a *Sesame Street* rip off. [laughs] The point is that there

were a lot of different ways that this scene was a counterculture. Unfortunately, now the community of people that are focused on countercultural ideas has decreased—which is indicative of the times. People are a little bit more apathetic these days. That's one of the reasons why George Bush is in office.

Tomas: There was definitely a split of people around 1994-'95, between what became the

more underground electronic music scene and what still remains today the "rave" scene. *XLR8R* does not cover the latter due to its superficial values. The rave scene today is more geared towards a first time party-goer and a really, really young crowd. The whole aesthetic of rave has become really commercialized. Even though these events are frequently underground, the whole aesthetic, which once was rebellious and about an independent, DIY spirit has basically become homogenized into a formula of paraphernalia and baggy clothing. It lost a lot of the political weight, the social consciousness . . .

Andrew: It became a formula, a type of conformity. It became solidified as a subgenre and it'll probably stay that way, just

like we still have goth and rockabilly.

Tomas: When that split between underground electronic music and "rave" happened, we specifically chose to stop covering that aspect of electronic music and concentrate our focus on the more DIY aspects. ¶ I can see why a lot of punks these days think that electronic music is basically the disco of this era. They want to be against it because they perceive all electronic music as this very conformist rave formula. It's true that a lot of things happening in the younger rave scene right now reflect a lot of the excess of the disco era at its worst. But we have to remember that electronic music has gone in its own direction, and remains aesthetically important just as it was back in the disco era, when there was this really important social movement happening. When disco started, it was a part of the gay rights movement. The Black and Latino influence in disco got lost in the mainstream coverage of that music. And disco



was acceptance by some punks back then as well. *XLR8R* always tries to remember the spirit of the NY club Paradise Garage. At Paradise, there was a time when the Tom Tom Club, The Clash, the O'Jays, and proto-house records were always getting played in one night and every kind of person was in the house checking it out.

This reminds me a lot of the kind of rationales I use to explain why I find punk culture something worth continuing to explore, even though I cringe at the kind of aesthetic homogeneity and ritualism which draws some people towards punk. I recall going to punk parties in the early '80s, where I would hear everything from the Tom Tom Club to the Bad Brains getting played in a single night. I can't say that many of us would have had the same experience at a similar occasion in the late '90s, when a particular kind of genre-based communal identity set in, revolving around hardcore, pop-punk etc.

Tomas: What people have to realize is that it doesn't get any more punk than being a black kid from the inner city in Detroit making records on cheap-ass Roland synthesizers back in the early-to-mid '80s. It doesn't get any more punk than that. There was no inclusionary factor in white, suburban punk through the '80s and early '90s. I think that if punk is a facet of do-it-yourself culture and of creating your own rules and your own system outside of the mainstream, there's no better example than the birth of dance music in Detroit. Those guys were totally persecuted for what they were doing for a period of time. They were totally ignored by pretty much all of America. It definitely was going against mainstream suburbia's love of the guitar. They were like "No, we're not going to love the guitar. We're going to love something that has a beat to it."

Beats are very political in and of themselves. There's something very libidinally constructive about them. I think that punk- and rock-oriented audiences tend to miss out on what that's about. They tend to associate beats with irresponsibility, hedonism and partying.

Andrew: They don't necessarily think of the music as being a statement unto itself.

Right. They tend to hear the music as though it was an affirmation of an existing culture that they choose to reject. I think it has everything to do with the puritanical asceticism of hardcore, which is very Protestant. It's anti-modernist.

Andrew: That's true.

When I read your magazine, I get the sense that you're documenting an incredibly wide cultural spectrum. But there's still a very strong DIY element to the magazine which stops it from being elitist or patronizing.

Tomas: I don't think we're trying to be exclusive or genre-based. The whole idea is to be subversive. We get compared to these mainstream electronic music magazines all the time. We're being purchased by the same consumer audience as *Urb*, *Mixer*, and *BPM*. They open us up and expect to see A-list DJs and things like that and what they get instead is our vision of what's important in terms of electronic music. That, in a sense, is the hook. You want to draw in your average electronic music fan so that they can get a dose of what we consider to be authentic electronic music culture.

Andrew: That's a good point. I think that the magazine was considered elitist some time ago. One of the things that changed that is the opening up of the design and legibility of

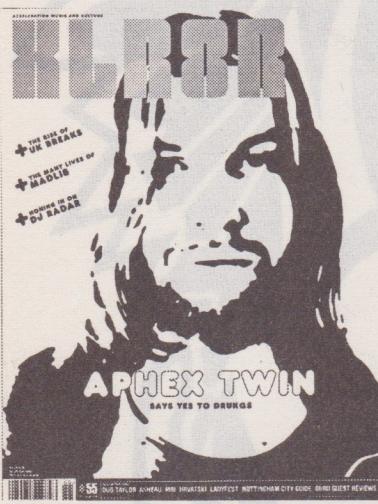
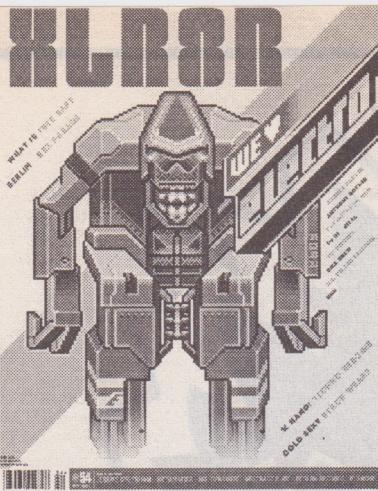
the magazine, which was trying to make a statement of its own. The design at the time was trying to affect people in the same way that music was. We discovered that if you do both—you write about cryptic things and try to enlighten people and then design in a cryptic manner and try to enlighten them by making them interpret what it is, you can't really win both arguments. Just in presentation alone, we've changed a lot and don't seem quite as elitist. There's a lot of people who don't think and just look at the artists we write about and think we're elitist. For example, some guy who is into trance music and doesn't see any trance in the reviews section is going to think we're elitist. The same person, however, is not necessarily willing to open his mind to other stuff.

That's interesting, because when I read *XLR8R* now, versus the first time I read it four years ago, it doesn't even come across as an electronic music magazine anymore. The eclecticism of your coverage is a force against it being identified with a specific genre. Has that been an issue for you?

Ron: Every time I'm asked about the magazine and am forced to explain what it's about., I think to myself, "Are we there filling a space that magazine XXX doesn't fill? Are we in combat with them, are we standing beside them, or are we looking to push past them into a new era and forge something new?" Rhetorically, it's the last. But when you talk to people about it – when you speak to someone who reads *Urb* most of the time about *XLR8R*, I wonder what it is I'm looking to do.

Tomas: But you can't get around the fact that there's a battle going on, which is a battle of honesty versus dishonesty. What I see as being dishonest is when you try and gear the readership into being a consumer population that only has a couple of choices. We're saying that





there are many other choices out there, which because of the machinations of the way that the American music business works, you're not exposed to. Let's face it: other magazines out there are just vehicles for mainstream record company marketing plans. That's what they exist for. They openly take bribes from labels in the form of advertising in order to sell a record for a label. That's what's given in exchange.

Andrew: I don't know if people necessarily know what they want out of a magazine anymore. I think they open up a magazine and expect to find out what's happening and have the magazine say to them "You know about this, so let's tell you some more." Whereas I feel that one of the most important roles of a magazine is to tell you something you *never* knew, to introduce you to new concepts and new ideas. Our question is, "Are people prepared to think like that? Are they willing to expand their horizons and be educated?" We have to weigh that too, while at the same time giving them material that they are already familiar with in order to introduce them to something totally new. That is, unless you want to deal with a very, very small part of the population.

Tomas: Let's face it. Culture in general over the past nine years has been in this curve of being dumbed down. That's affected every type of imaginable media that you can pick up or think of, from radio to movies, print media and magazines. It's all being geared in that way. It assumes that the public doesn't have an opinion. Assuming that any audience can't think for themselves, doesn't want to or is too stupid to is the difference between a media outlet that is operating honestly and one that's dishonest.

Andrew: You might as well take all of the yellow and blue or whatever colored 8.5 x 11 sheets, just put a staple on it and some press photos in between, and send it off to a designer. That's a magazine you can put together in five minutes. All you need to is sell lots of ads.

Tomas: The real sad thing is that this poison has seeped into the bloodstream of writers today, so that we're constantly being pitched by these mouthpieces of major labels and people who basically suck off the goods of PR companies and PR agencies. I'm sure Punk Planet gets this all the time too—writers who only

get stuff from Epitaph who basically feel compelled to write about Epitaph records, because that's what they're told to write about.

**Yes—it's totally depressing.**

Tomas: There's this dialogue going on out there. Possibly new things are coming out in it. What I like about working at XLR8R is that Andrew contributes some of that dialogue that I don't know about, Ron contributes some of that dialogue that I don't know about, and Dave our designer contributes a lot of information that none of us know about. In fact our designer goes to great lengths to find out what the dialogues are amongst kids in inner city London, inner city Japan, and inner city Germany. That's what he brings to the table. So that's kind of why we're not just about music anymore.

Electronic music has grown to be such a big thing that people do clothing lines based on their love of electronic music.

Ron: I think that's why, to a certain extent, the culture aspect was added to the identity of the magazine. And we're stretching it out to politics, literature, and media in general. There's a lot more of that than before. Part of that is connected to how the core of the magazine has grown older. I think it's still a little ambiguous, but I think there's a notion of a higher mission. We're looking right now to *make the culture*—to have a hand in making the culture. That's why we're putting the time and the labor into what we're doing. Because it's in our hands to do. We're taking in a lot of people, older and younger, and they're having a hand in it as well. Its something different than what we did before. It's not a music magazine anymore.

Andrew: Now we don't know what it is. [laughs] That could be the headline: "We don't know what it is we're doing!"

Ron: That's always been the headline! ©



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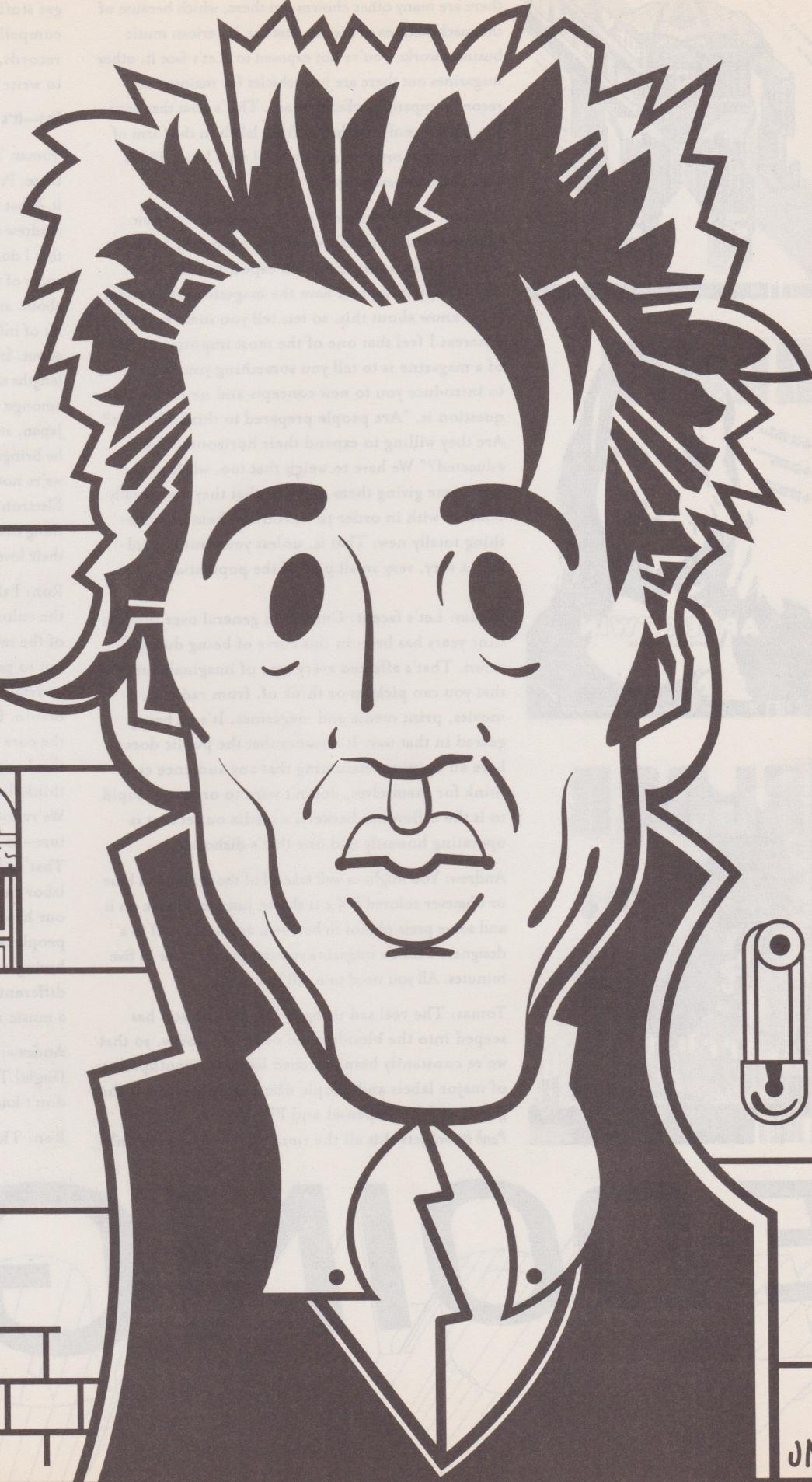
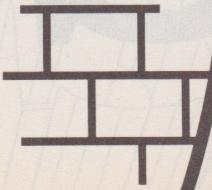
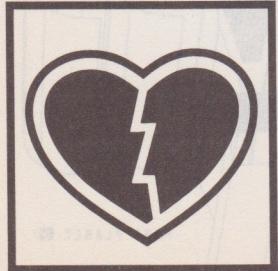
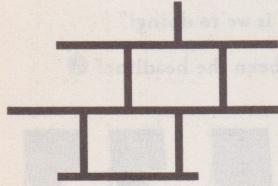
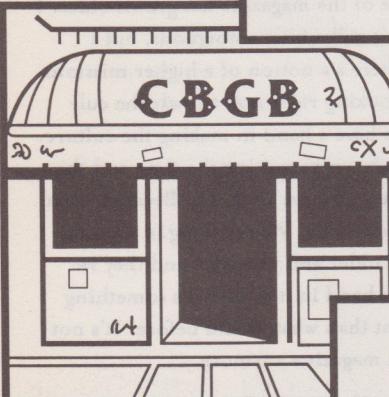
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**I**t may be a cliché, but it's also true: Richard Hell is one of the true Renaissance men of the underground. While best known for his groundbreaking work in the early New York punk scene, Hell has also worked in the visual arts, written extensively (at one point even editing his own literary magazine), and even acted in films.

As co-founder of Television with his Lexington, KY childhood friend Tom Verlaine, Hell helped to expand the possibilities for music. Early Television sounded less like dirty roots-rock than the New York Dolls, but no less in-your-face. Hell and Verlaine had come to New York to be artists, but made the transition from poets-on-the-make to "made" men of the cultural underground. The two friends eventually parted ways. Verlaine had grown weary of Hell's high-octane stage antics. But the main problem was that Television, like so many other bands, just didn't have room for two strong-willed songwriters.

Hell went on to form the Heartbreakers with Johnny Thunders and Jerry Nolan from the New York Dolls before discovering that he needed more room than that proto-punk supergroup could provide.

Finally, he assembled the Voidoids with Robert Quine, Ivan Julian, and Marc Bell and put out *Blank Generation*, by almost anyone's standards one of the most significant records of the 1970s.

By the end of the '70s (a decade he refuses to talk about in interviews), Hell's troubles with heroin and long-standing ambivalence towards the music industry had taken their toll. Yet he regrouped in the early 1980s and put out *Destiny's Street*, which

was widely praised. 1984 saw the release of *RIP*, a collection of previously unreleased odds and ends that marked his departure from the rock music treadmill. Since then, Hell the musician has pretty much stayed out of sight, with the notable exception of 1992's *Dim Stars EP*, which he recorded with Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore and Steve Shelley and Gumball's Don Fleming.

But as critic Robert Palmer noted in a review of that record, "Rarely has a rocker been so influential with such a small body of recorded work." Our fascination with artists who are reluctant to share their art—like J.D. Salinger releasing only two or three stories in a decade—has something to do with this state of affairs. But most of the blame rests with the power of Hell's art.

It doesn't hurt, of course, that he has consistently worked in other media: poetry, fiction, non-fiction, drawing and film. When we presume that Hell's limited musical catalog only represents the tip of the iceberg, we aren't just engaged in wishful thinking. Unlike the Sex Pistols, Kurt Cobain, or—god forbid—Boston, Hell's small body of work feels less like an accident of circumstance than a conscious decision on his part to make us question the value of productivity without substance.

Now, as Hell embarks on his fifth decade, we have the opportunity to consider his work as a whole as never before. In 2001,

he published *Hot and Cold*, a compendium of his shorter writings and visual art. Now he's offering us *Time*, a double CD on Matador Records that includes both the long out-of-print *RIP* with previously unreleased tracks and a manic 1977 live show at the Music Machine in England. As an in-depth examination of these retrospectives demonstrates, Hell has always embodied the spirit of punk. His energy, his iconoclasm, and his commitment to art that is both accessible and profound marks him as a role model for anyone who cares more about culture than industry.

Interview by Charlie Bertsch

Illustration by Jim Horwitz

You have always been highly selective about what you make public. What led you to release *Time*?

I have a closet full of tapes. In the back of my mind, permanently is, the idea that there are items that it would be nice to have in circulation. Except that's usually where it stays: In the back of my mind! [laughs] Of course, many of them are in circulation unofficially.



It seems like there's a whole industry devoted to bootlegs of your work.

The real factor that triggered the decision to put this material out this time was a guy in New York called Mike Carlucci, who has a record store called Subterranean that specializes in New York music from the '70s era like me, Verlaine, and Patti Smith. He's always coming up with suggestions. And this time he hooked me up with Gerard Cosloy at Matador, said he knew that Gerard was into our material. Mike's always encouraging me to dig out my ratty cassette tapes. [laughs] So I had lunch with Gerard and we talked about what the possibilities were. In a gigantic, car-sized nutshell, there you have it.

#### Did Gerard have to twist your arm at all?

I knew I'd like to get *RIP* out on a CD with my approval because it had been released a few times basically without my permission. It had been out of print for three or four years. I thought it was worthy of being in print. I knew 15-20 tapes of live gigs that were circulating among fanatics. And I always had a soft spot for that Music Machine set because it's so manic. [laughs] We were very tight at that time, because not only had we been playing weekly for a year at CBGBs, we had also just done this tour playing nightly for a month with The Clash. And we were really angry and disgusted, which always produces the best music.

#### Unless you're playing new age piano . . .

[laughs] I had my reservations about releasing that recording, because it's very low-

fi. I wasn't sure it was wise. So I just said, "Check it out, Gerard. Let me know what you think." He was into it.

#### It has been a long time since you went through the process of putting out a record. Has the experience changed a lot?

You know what was news to me, though it may not be news to anybody else, is that they told me at Matador to make the booklet as good as possible—which is something I was going to do anyway—because people don't buy commercial releases for the CDs anymore. They can just copy them or burn them at home. And that has really put a dent in sales. So the thing is to make the booklet as desirable as possible, because that's actually more of a selling point than the material! [laughs]

I haven't heard that put so bluntly before. But I can see one sense in which it might be a good thing for art, even if it's a bad thing for sales, because most "artists" are not so able to put together interesting stuff as people like yourself, who have a lot to offer besides the songs.

I was definitely glad to be encouraged to kick out the jams on the booklet—and we did. I wrote this 2,000 word essay. We took a lot of pictures. And we did this painstaking job of aligning it page by page.

Reading the essay, I noticed that the lyrics to the song "Time," which you discuss in depth, don't match the words sung on the recording.

[laughs] I realized that part way through it, but thought I would just go with the flow. The recording of "Time" on the CD was the first time we laid it down. It was like a demo tape. I eventually tweaked the lyrics a little bit. I thought, if I'm going to go through the trouble of writing this elabo-

rate analysis of how I wrote the song, I want to use the final version. But everything I say in my interpretation of the song in that essay applies to the lyrics that are on the CD version as well. They're just slightly reworded.

It may have just been a casual thing, but you just said "in my interpretation of the song."

And that made me wonder: As you went through the tapes again to put this release together, to what extent did you find yourself engaged in interpreting your own work?

I don't really do any active interpretation. I mean, I'll have a response from hearing something old like that. Back in the late '80s, when I was editing a literary magazine I had started up called *Cuz*, I initiated this feature where I asked poets to take one of their pieces from an issue and write an open account of how the poem came to be written, what they meant by putting things the way did. I called it "The Story of My Poem." We'd run one of these in each issue. The poets would describe not only their thought processes, but also their physical surroundings when they wrote it, where their heads were at. It was kind of like aesthetic gossip. I've always been fascinated by that sort of thing. It's not necessarily more valid than what the reader or listener would derive from a work without having heard what the writer was intending, but the exercise is interesting and fun.

A couple people who know your work told me not to ask you about the 1970s. The problem with that, though, is that many of the recordings on *Time* are from the 1970s. So I'm curious to hear your thoughts on doing publicity for the album. Are you dreading every interview? Or have you reconciled yourself to the idea of having to perform as a founding father of punk?

It's my policy not to talk about that period because it's just too boring. I've said everything I could possibly say on that subject. I

**People don't buy commercial releases for the CDs anymore. They can just copy them or burn them at home. And that has really put a dent in sales. So the thing is to make the booklet as desirable as possible, because that's actually more of a selling point than the material!**

In a way, [*Hot and Cold*] is different from other books of its type . . . I feel that it's integrated. It's more like a painting, say, where it all exists in one whole that your eye can move around in. You don't have to read it from beginning to end, though you can.

don't have anything to add. People are just so fascinated with that time and place that, if you're willing, you'll never be able to do anything else. They'll just ask you questions forever.

I can understand not wanting to be pinned down like that. But the album is something of a paradox, because it rekindles that fascination. In particular, the quality of the Music Machine gig, because it does sound so rough and intense, removes the recording from our digitally-processed world. It reminds us how different life was 25 years ago. And that feeling that the 1970s represent a distant past is bound to inspire nostalgia.

Obviously, I'm aware that in doing promotions for this release I'm going to have to deal with that part of my life to some degree. And I think you're right about the feel of that recording. I thought that a lot of the appeal and interest in that Music Machine gig, what compensated for its low-fi sound, is its "you are there" effect. It really is representative of that moment in a strong way.

Those of us who are old enough can still remember what it was like to listen to bootleg cassettes, where just discerning a tune required a will of iron. But now even the bootlegs are run through computers to give them high production values. And many of them are based on DAT field recordings to begin with.

[laughs] You're into the ugly! I do think that the version on the album is the best we could have done. We worked to try to bring out the details. There was no bass. The room was bad for sound—it just bounced around—but that's what it would have sounded like to someone who was there at the show too.

You've done a lot with your writing in recent years, leading up to the publication of *Hot and Cold* last year, and very little with music, at least in terms of what you've released for the public. With this record coming out now,

would you like to see people make more of a connection between your music and the rest of your work? To what extent do you see all your work forming a whole?

To me, it's seamless. The book gave me a way of putting together all that material in different forms. Everything supports everything else. It's not just an anthology, or a reader, or a collection of odds and ends. It's a cohesive work. That's what I wanted to do. In a way, it's different from other books of its type. I felt like I accomplished that. I was happy with the way it came out. I worked really long and hard figuring out how to organize it. It's not as if I'm going to resent somebody randomly skipping around in it—I have no problem with that. I do it myself. Still, I feel that it's integrated. It's more like a painting, say, where it all exists in one whole that your eye can move around in. You don't have to read it from beginning to end, though you can. I deliberately designed it that way too, because it is, in essence, chronological. ¶ But to get back to your actual question [laughs] about whether everything I do forms a whole: Yes. Completely. I see my work as a big sphere. And individual works are like portholes from which you can look into the sphere, providing different angles on the grotesque [laughs] and ecstatic contents of the sphere.

Did you have that perspective on your work when a lot of the stuff that's in the book hadn't been done yet?

I first started conceiving of this book as a book in about 1983. That was the first time I realized that I wanted to take the drawings and collages that I'd been making as well as my poems, and the anecdotes, essays, and notebooks I'd been doing and compile a

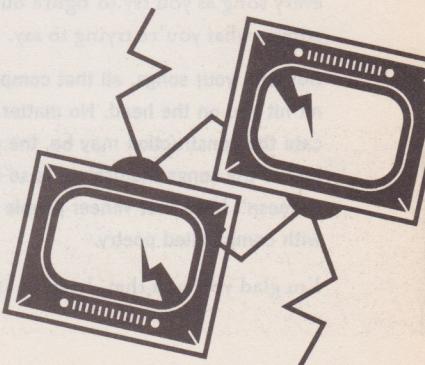
book from them. Part of the approach in the book too—in order to avoid the anthology-reader effect—was that I didn't take any excerpts from anything. I didn't take a piece from my novel or the other little short novel. I didn't take any of the notebooks that are in the earlier notebook/pamphlet artifact. I wanted all the stuff to be woven together. I don't like anthology readers for that reason. They're basically advertisements for the author's work.

They are like greatest-hits albums. I've always had problems with those, because I'd much rather hear the music in its original context.

Exactly. So it had been in my mind for a long time to have a book like this. It's also completely coincidental, but a happy coincidence that the Matador thing happened at the same time. That wasn't deliberate. When I met with Gerard to discuss the possibility of putting a record out, he didn't know anything about *Hot and Cold*.

We were talking earlier about how the lyrics on the page for "Time" were different than the actual recording. With a lot of musicians, when you look at the words to one of their songs on the page you think, "That doesn't capture what makes the song good at all." I was curious what you think about the distinction between the words as they are actually sung and the words as they get printed. Is it disconcerting sometimes?

I've never really liked the lyrics to songs apart from the music they're set to. Most of the time, the result seems very colorless and obvious and awkward and lame. [laughs] There are exceptions, but



not too many. And usually the way that they work when they are successful, is that they evoke the song for you. All the atmosphere and feeling that the music brings are evoked by the lyrics. That has a lot to do with your pleasure at being able to read the lyrics on the page. But, frankly, I think that my lyrics are the rare exception [*laughs*] to the rule for lyrics apart from songs.

A lot of times, with a song you really like, when you look at the lyrics on the page they come off completely flat. Part of it, I think, is that even with really good songs the stress—the metrical stress in the sense of poetry—comes from the beats in the song. Instead of the stress coming from within the words themselves, as you would in a conventional poem, it comes from the music. But with your songs, there's always this tension between the lyrics and what's happening with the drums, bass, and guitar. There's already this sense of your words doing struggle with the rest of the music. That's what makes your music so exciting.

I would write too many words sometimes. And I would really press and rush to get the whole line into the space allotted by the drumbeats. I felt happy looking back over those lyrics in print just to notice how hard I fucking worked on them, man. There are lots of things going on in those lyrics, many different ways of using the possibilities in the words: complex rhymes, alliteration, really involved rhyme schemes. I also remembered how much fun it is. I mean, I haven't written many songs lately. You come up with these little challenges for yourself. Each song is very different. They aren't like quatrains. Every song has a different number of lines per verse and different lengths of lines. Each verse matches the other one. So you're starting from scratch in a really stimulating way with every song as you try to figure out how to convey what you're trying to say.

But with your songs, all that complexity doesn't hit you on the head. No matter how intricate the construction may be, the presentation of the songs themselves is so immediate. It doesn't have that veneer people associate with complicated poetry.

I'm glad you said that, because it's some-

thing I wanted to mention. That's another cool thing about the songs. It's all verbal, not abstract. You're saying things the way you would in a conversation. But it's done in these complex forms. As I point out in the essay for the album when I'm discussing the song "Time," you can do things in a loose way that might seem sort of primitive on the page, but seems perfectly natural in the song. It's fun to do things that way—it really works in songs. People sometimes write about my stuff as if it were the work of a poet who comes up with the words and then sets them to music. It was nothing like that. Writing songs is a whole other thing that's really fun and interesting on its own terms. But they're not *poetry*. They're *songs*. It's an entirely different undertaking.

**When you first started to write songs, you had already been a poet for a while. Did you find the difference between poetry and songwriting frustrating at first?**

No, I loved it. It was like the reverse of the way things used to be. People always used to write poems that way. Before printing and writing were widespread, poems were made to be easily memorized. They were always done in meter and rhyme, because that made them easier to remember. Then, with the advent of printing press and more recent media, poetry became a lot more loose. I'm really into poetry that's the most loose. It's the most open form of *going*, of exploiting all the possibilities of language and consciousness without being restricted formally by the need to be passed down as oral tradition. ¶ At the same time, I think it's really neat to write the way that you need to do in songs. Of course, there are people who use really new song forms too. But I really liked coming up with all those rhyme schemes and line links.

**When you got started in the music business, it was as an outsider. You and many other leaders of the New York scene in the 1970s started to make rock music as a way of communicating your art. But the art preceded the rock for you, Patti Smith, Tom Verlaine and others. You were artists working in rock, not rock musicians who stumbled into making art. The reasons for that are complex, but a lot of it, if you read memoirs from that era, had to do with frustration at the way the art world was set up. Rock gave you a way of bypassing the blockages in more traditional media. It seems different today. People complain that the limits on free expression that once plagued the world of galleries and concert halls now plague the independent music scene as well. Do you share their pessimism?**

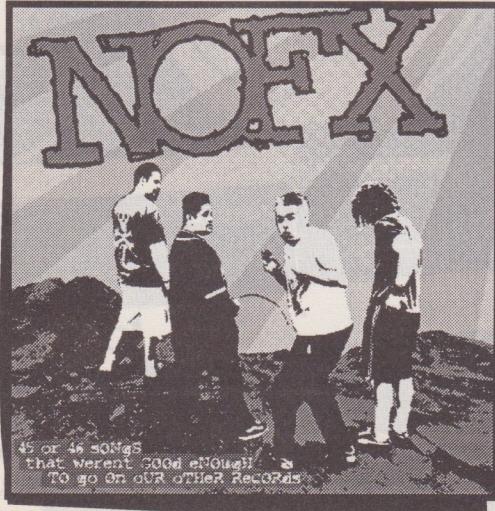
I'm asked that a lot. And it's usually with this tone of regret, as if they are saying "You can't do that now." But my only response to that attitude is, "It felt the same to me then as it must feel to you now." Things were pretty boring in 1972, which is why we were driven to liven them up. You just have to take the initiative, to find the time and means for doing things in a fresh way. If things are boring now, do something about it. ☺

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*Charlie Bertsch is a writer and teacher living in Tucson, Arizona. Send him your thoughts electronically cbertsch@u.arizona.edu or by regular mail Charles Bertsch, Modern Languages, PO Box 210067, Tucson, AZ 85721-0067*

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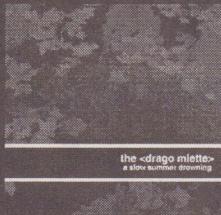
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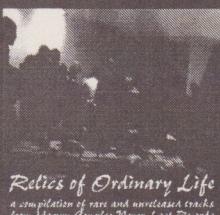
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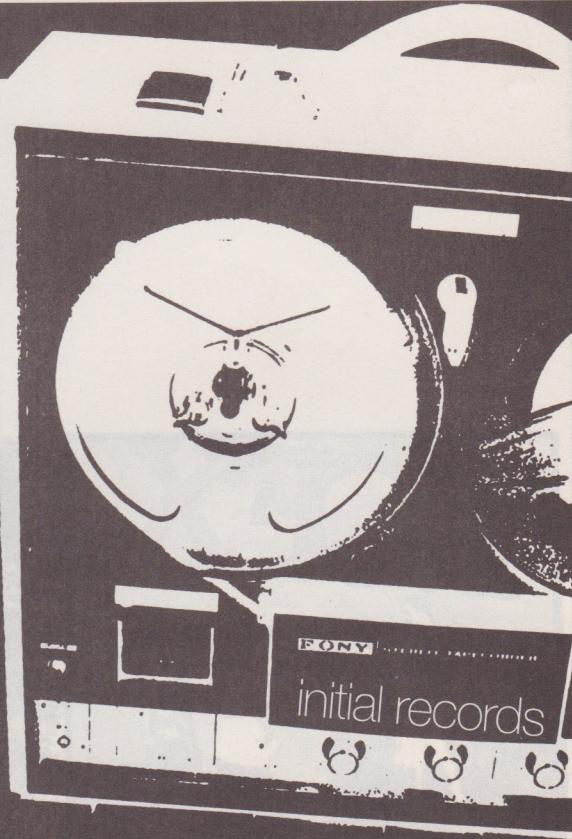
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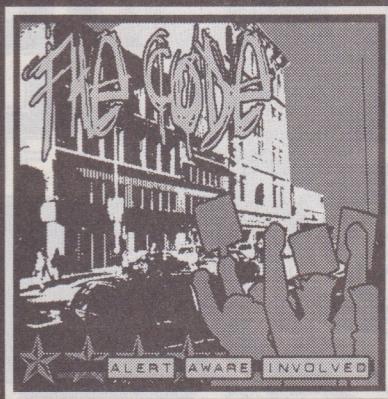
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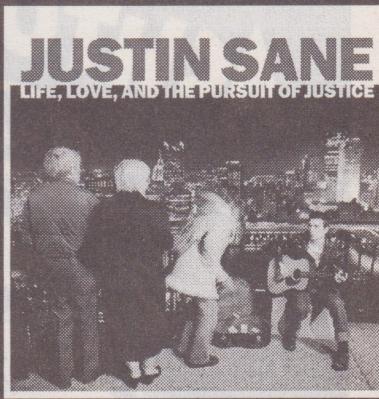
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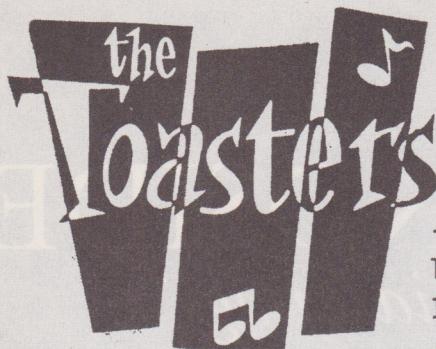
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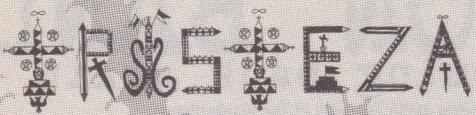
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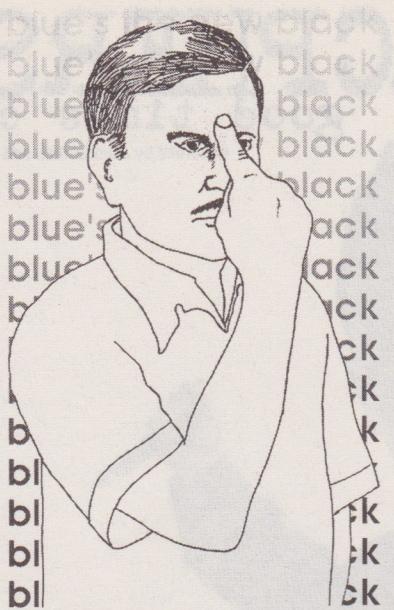
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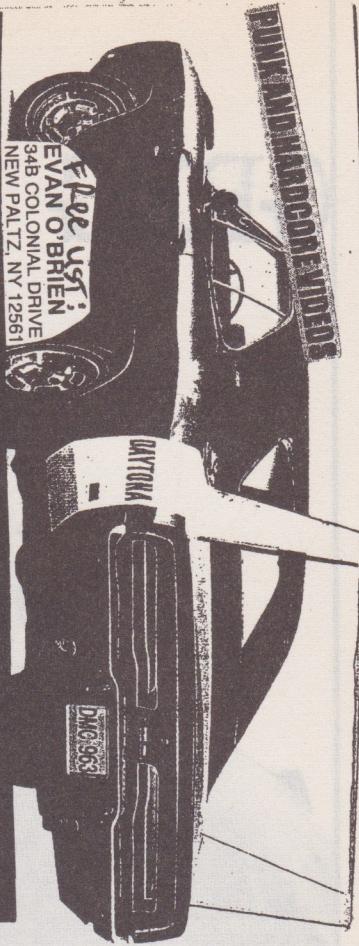


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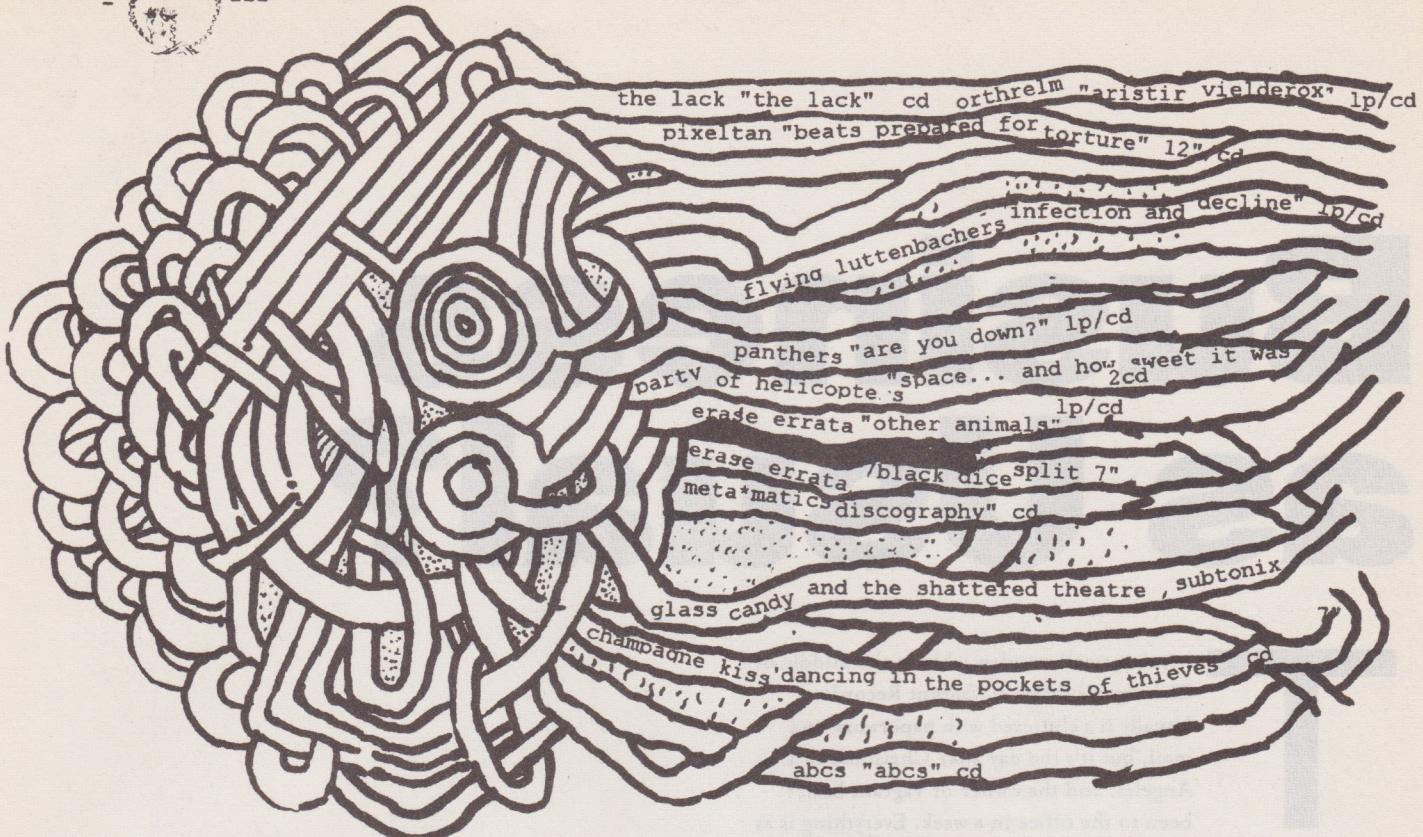
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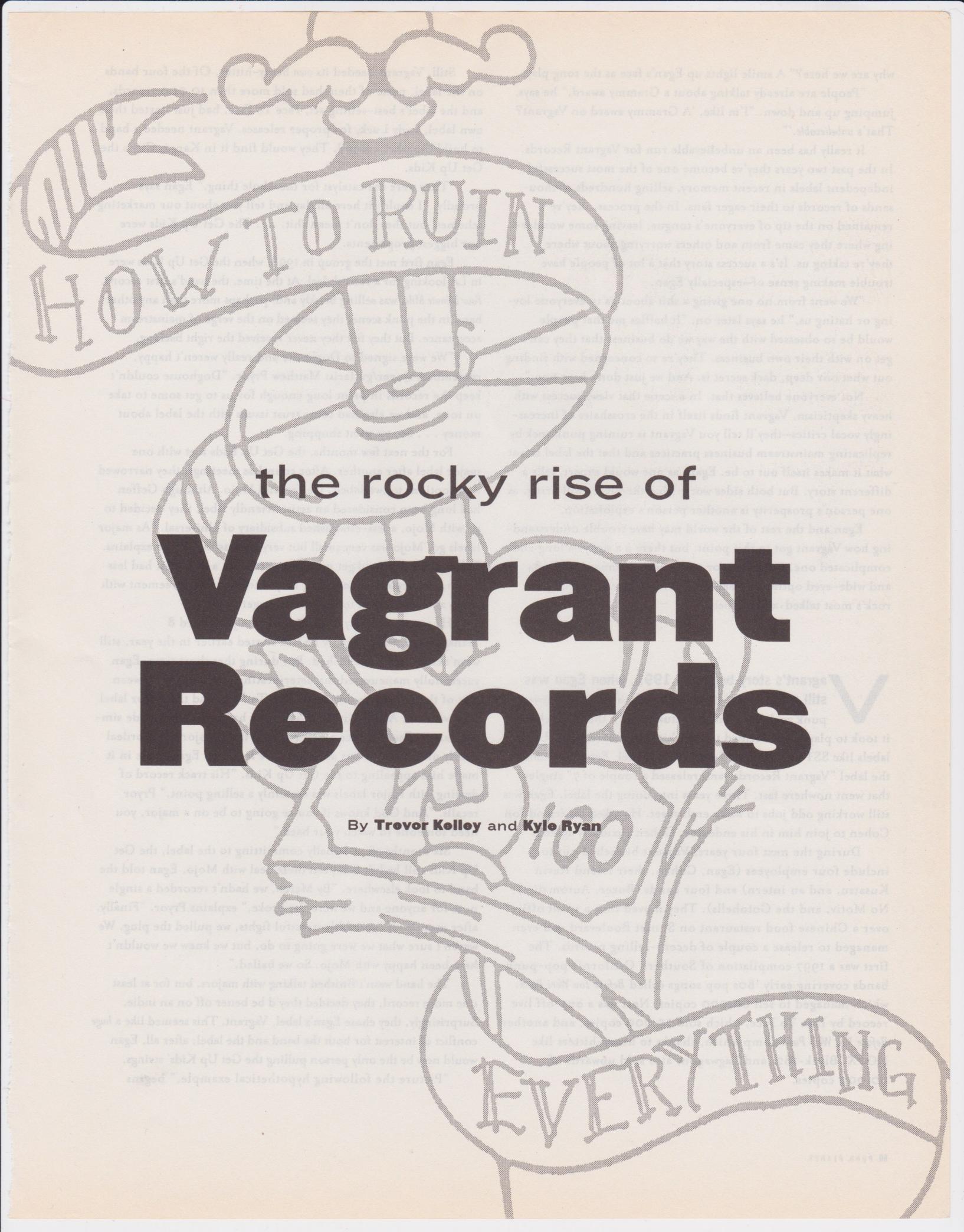
# Business as Usual?

**T**here's a small wooden table in the middle of Rich Egan's office at Vagrant Records. Usually it's cluttered with paperwork and mail, but it's the day after Christmas in Los Angeles, and the owner of Vagrant hasn't been to the office in a week. Everything is as he left it before the holiday break. Right now, the only things on the table are a couple of letters and a CD.

The letters, scrawled on wrinkled yellow ledger paper, are nearly illegible. One of the letters is signed "Osama Bin Laden." The other makes some obscure reference to the passing of George Harrison. The letters don't make sense, not even to Egan. Not that he's trying too hard to figure them out—after all, they're from Paul Westerberg.

Egan began corresponding with the legendary frontman of the seminal '80s punk band the Replacements a few months ago, and the two have become fast friends. For Christmas, Egan sent Westerberg a book about Bob Dylan after Westerberg signed on with Vagrant to release his next solo record. It was the greatest gift anyone could have given Egan. "That man changed my whole life," he says, beaming. "He's, I think, among one of the three greatest songwriters—up there with Bob Dylan and Brian Wilson—in American history. So to be able to say he's on our label and have a record like the one he turned in, which is so brilliant . . . I can't even fathom it."

Egan gets up and slips the CD into his stereo. He turns the volume up a hair. What comes out is absolutely heartbreakingsong of such beauty and sadness that it could only come out of a tiny fracture in the heart of one very old soul. The song is called "We May Be The Ones." Of all of the songs Westerberg has turned in to Vagrant, this one seems closest to Egan's heart. When the chorus kicks in, Westerberg's throaty drawl trickles out: "We may well be the ones/To set this world on its ear/If not, then



HOW TO RUIN

the rocky rise of

# Vagrant Records

By Trevor Kelley and Kyle Ryan

EVERYTHING

why are we here?" A smile lights up Egan's face as the song plays.

"People are already talking about a Grammy award," he says, jumping up and down. "I'm like, 'A Grammy award on Vagrant? That's unbelievable.'"

It really has been an unbelievable run for Vagrant Records. In the past two years they've become one of the most successful independent labels in recent memory, selling hundreds of thousands of records to their eager fans. In the process, they've remained on the tip of everyone's tongue, leaving some wondering where they came from and others worrying about where they're taking us. It's a success story that a lot of people have trouble making sense of—especially Egan.

"We went from no one giving a shit about us to everyone loving or hating us," he says later on. "It baffles me that people would be so obsessed with the way we do business that they can't get on with their own business. They're so concerned with finding out what our deep, dark secret is. And we just don't have one."

Not everyone believes that. In a scene that views success with heavy skepticism, Vagrant finds itself in the crosshairs of increasingly vocal critics—they'll tell you Vagrant is ruining punk rock by replicating mainstream business practices and that the label is not what it makes itself out to be. Egan, as one would expect, tells a different story. But both sides worry what the future will bring, as one person's prosperity is another person's exploitation.

Egan and the rest of the world may have trouble understanding how Vagrant got to this point, but there is a story—a long and complicated one, full of rumor and accomplishment, setbacks and wide-eyed optimism—behind the rocky rise of one of punk rock's most talked-about labels.

**V**agrant's story begins in 1991, when Egan was still a freshman in college. Like any kid who loved punk rock but couldn't actually learn the three chords it took to play it, he decided to start his own record label. Using labels like SST and Dischord as his role model, Egan christened the label "Vagrant Records" and released a couple of 7" singles that went nowhere fast. Three years into doing the label, Egan was still working odd jobs to make ends meet. He asked his friend Jon Cohen to join him in his endeavor. Cohen anxiously agreed.

During the next four years, Vagrant branched out to include four employees (Egan, Cohen, their friend Kevin Kusatsu, and an intern) and four bands (Boxer, Automatic 7, No Motiv, and the Gotohells). They moved into a small office over a Chinese food restaurant on Sunset Boulevard and even managed to release a couple of decent-selling records. The first was a 1997 compilation of Southern California pop-punk bands covering early '80s pop songs called *Before You Were Punk*, which managed to sell 60,000 copies. Next was a one-off live record by Face To Face, which sold 75,000 copies, and another *Before You Were Punk* comp which, thanks to heavy-hitters like NOFX, Blink-182, and Lagwagon, also sold upwards of 60,000 copies.

Still, Vagrant needed its own heavy-hitter. Of the four bands on the label, none of them had sold more than 10,000 records, and the label's best-selling act, Face To Face, had just started their own label, Lady Luck, for proper releases. Vagrant needed a band to build the label around. They would find it in Kansas City's the Get Up Kids.

"They were the catalyst for the whole thing," Egan says proudly. "I could sit here all day and tell you about our marketing schemes, but they don't mean shit. . . . The Get Up Kids were our biggest proponents."

Egan first met the group in 1998, when the Get Up Kids were in LA looking for a record deal. At the time, the band's first record, *Four Minute Mile*, was selling briskly and, perhaps more than any other band in the punk scene, they seemed on the verge of mainstream acceptance. But they felt they never received the right backing.

"We were signed to Doghouse and really weren't happy," remembers singer/guitarist Matthew Pryor. "Doghouse couldn't keep the records in print long enough for us to get some to take on tour, and we also had some trust issues with the label about money . . . So, we went shopping."

For the next few months, the Get Up Kids met with one major label after another. After countless meetings, they narrowed their options to two labels: Geffen and Mojo. Although Geffen had long been considered an artist-friendly label, they decided to go with Mojo, a less-established subsidiary of Universal. "As major labels go, Mojo was very small but very successful," Pryor explains. "We figured that we'd get more support from a label that had less bands." In September of 1998, they made a verbal agreement with Mojo and asked Egan to be their manager.

He was an unlikely candidate for the job. Hard 8 Management, the company he had started earlier in the year, still wasn't completely established. But during that short time, Egan successfully maneuvered the deteriorating relationship between one of the groups he managed, Face To Face, and the major label they were on, A&M. Unlike other punk bands that had made similar jumps, Face To Face emerged from their major-label ordeal nearly unscathed. It was an impressive feat, and Egan's role in it made him appealing to the Get Up Kids. "His track record of dealing with major labels was certainly a selling point," Pryor recalls. "And God knows if you're going to be on a major, you need someone to watch your back."

Six months after verbally committing to the label, the Get Up Kids still hadn't finalized their deal with Mojo. Egan told the band to look elsewhere. "By March, we hadn't recorded a single note for anyone and we were flat broke," explains Pryor. "Finally, after months of incredibly stressful fights, we pulled the plug. We weren't sure what we were going to do, but we knew we wouldn't have been happy with Mojo. So we bailed."

The band wasn't finished talking with majors, but for at least one more record, they decided they'd be better off on an indie. Surprisingly, they chose Egan's label, Vagrant. This seemed like a huge conflict of interest for both the band and the label; after all, Egan would now be the only person pulling the Get Up Kids' strings.

"Picture the following hypothetical example," begins

DeSoto Records' Kim Coletta, who once managed bands like Smart Went Crazy and The Dismemberment Plan. "Say the band has an issue with their royalty statement. This is the type of situation where you'd ask your manager to contact the label to get answers. But what if they're the same person? One of the reasons larger bands have managers is so the managers can play 'bad cop' when a label isn't holding up their end of the deal. The manager can always step in and try to sort things out. But, in a situation like this, who would do that? You can't shout at yourself."

Admittedly, Pryor worried about such conflicts, so the Get Up Kids made things very clear. "If it ever got to be a conflict of interest, then either the label or the management would have to go," Pryor insists. "We still hold that true today."

Ultimately, Egan and the group came to an agreement, with Pryor assuring Egan, "If we trust you enough to be our manager, why wouldn't we trust you to put out our record?"

It helped that Egan was willing to come up with a small fortune to sign the band. He supplied an advance for recording, paid for living expenses, and even funded Heroes & Villains, an imprint label that the Get Up Kids would use to support their friends. In the end, signing the band would cost Vagrant more than \$50,000. But Egan had spent the previous eight years waiting to take this step. With opportunity knocking, nothing stood in his way.

"To sign the Get Up Kids, we really put ourselves at risk financially," Egan admits. "I don't think I've said this before in press, but my partner Jon's parents loaned us the money to sign the Get Up Kids by mortgaging their house. I owe the label to Jon."

On September 28, 1999, Vagrant released *Something To Write Home About*, and sales met general expectations. In its first few months, the record sold close to 40,000 copies—right on par with the band's peers, such as The Promise Ring and Burning Airlines.

But merely keeping up with the group's contemporaries did not satisfy Egan; he wanted more. For the next two years, Vagrant and the Get Up Kids would work side by side to push *Something To Write Home About*'s sales skyward. For the Get Up Kids, this meant tour after tour after tour, including stints opening up huge auditoriums for Green Day and reunited alt-rock heroes Weezer.

The band's high-profile tours increased interest to the group, and sales of *Something To Write Home About* surpassed 150,000 copies. But at what cost?

"The Get Up Kids weren't some band that had been around for years and were punk-rock heroes—they were kind of an instant success story," says Dan Askew, a friend of the band and owner of the Kansas City label Second Nature. "I think it turned into a business. I hardly ever see them anymore, but sometimes I do, and I think 'Are they still happy doing this?'"

There was no doubt Egan was happy. The success of *Something To Write Home About* had changed the face of Vagrant Records. They went from four employees to 13 and moved into a spacious warehouse in East LA. They also signed a half a dozen new

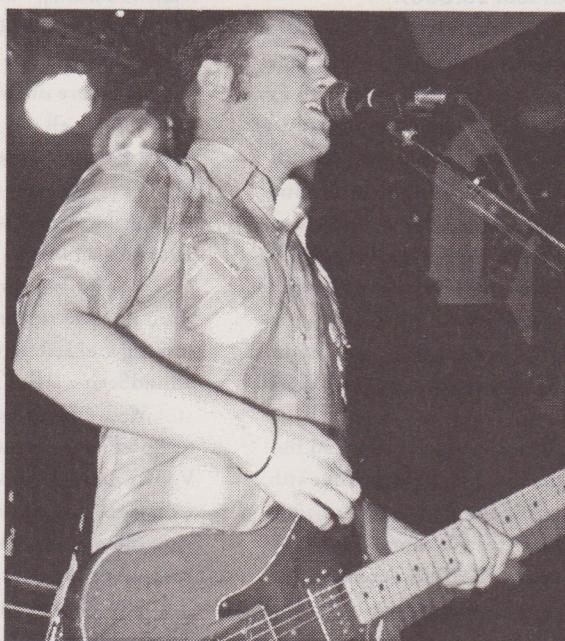


Photo by Steven Seiler

**T**o sign the **Get Up Kids**, we really put ourselves at risk financially," says Vagrant's Rich Egan admits. "I don't think I've said this before in press, but my partner Jon's parents loaned us the money to sign the Get Up Kids by mortgaging their house."

acts, most of which came via the Get Up Kid's Heroes & Villains imprint.

Egan was aggressively re-investing his share of the profits into the label. He paid for tour support, buses, and provided advances for records in sums that most indie labels would find appalling. To help pay for all this, both Egan and Cohen passed on taking paychecks during this particular growth spurt.

the rocky rise of vagrant records

"The idea was instead of keeping that money and putting it in our pockets, we should put it back in the company," Egan says. "And we have. I think that basically opened the floodgates for a group of bands that wanted to come here. I think that bands saw that we got behind our bands; they saw how much work we were putting in. We worked that Get Up Kids record for two years! I think people saw that and thought 'Gee, I wish my label would put that much behind us.'"

**O**ne such person was Matt Skiba. His band, the Chicago pop-punk trio the Alkaline Trio, had released two well-received LPs on the independent Asian Man Records: 1998's *Godamnit*, (which sold 12,000 copies) and 1999's *Maybe I'll Catch Fire* (which sold 20,000).

Rich Egan had long been a fan of the Alkaline Trio, often referring to them as "the best new band in America." Like their labelmates the Get Up Kids, the band had been friends with Egan before signing to Vagrant, having first met him when they toured with Face To Face. Originally, Egan offered to put out *Maybe I'll Catch Fire* and major labels were also interested in the band, but the Trio had already committed the record to Asian Man.

"I even remember saying that it was a good opportunity for them to reach bigger and better things, but they really wanted me to do it," says Mike Park, Asian Man's owner.

The record went on to sell more than 2,000 copies via mail order in its first three weeks. Both full-lengths have since cleared 30,000 copies a piece.

However, many of the group's fans couldn't even find the records at their local stores, and the band felt that signing with Vagrant could help eradicate that problem. The label provided an evolution of sorts for the band: better distribution, a better recording budget, and more publicity. The Trio signed on for two records (with the possibility of a third) and continued to follow in the Get Up Kids' footsteps by hiring Egan as their manager; the band had no qualms with Egan's dual role.

"There's definitely a risk you take letting your label owner be your manager, but initially Rich made it very clear that whatever we wanted to do, it's up to us," Skiba says. "And he was just there to help us." Unlike the Get Up Kids, the Trio's relationship with Egan would prove to be ephemeral—and end with a very public airing of grievances.

But in the beginning, everything went smoothly. The Trio flew out to LA for a two-day marketing meeting with the label, a new experience for them. In the meeting, both Egan and the group mapped out what could be a promising future. They planned to shoot a video, air television commercials during MTV's *Jackass* and get the band on some high-profile tours. The band listed three big bands they wanted to tour with: Green Day, Blink-182, and the Foo Fighters. Just a year earlier, they were begging to play small DIY shows. Asian Man, which Park runs out of his mom's garage, never pitched videos to MTV, much less television commercials.

Egan knew that he had something with the Alkaline Trio, just as he had with the Get Up Kids a few years prior. Once again his instincts kicked in, and he wanted more—the bigger, the better. "It's my job to sell as many records as possible," Egan reiterates. "With the Trio, it was no different."

On April 3, 2001, the band released *From Here To Infirmary*, their debut on Vagrant Records. High record sales the first week of release (which could get the album into chain stores and bigger record stores) were inflated by crafty use of SoundScan, an industry system that tracks record sales. In order to make the first week's sales pack a punch, Vagrant worked a deal with carefully selected independent record stores. In chain stores that use SoundScan, one record sale counts as one record sale, but not everyone uses SoundScan, especially independently owned "mom and pop" record stores. To compensate for stores that don't use its system, SoundScan gives certain retailers a heavier "weight"—where one sale would be tallied as three, five, or even more, depending on the store.

As a result, the Trio would play an in-store performance at a weighted store during the day, then representatives from that store would sell the record at the real show that night. When kids would flock to the separate merchandise table to buy the record, all sales at the show would count for many times more than their technical worth. A week of shows like that, and your sales figures can really add up.

"It's bullshit pretty much, I think," Skiba says of the system. "You sell one record, you sell one record. But it's like if a store coming and selling one record is going to show up as three on SoundScan . . . it's like, why not?"

Well, for starters, it's against SoundScan policy. According to Rob Sisco, executive vice president and general manager of VNU Entertainment (the company that runs SoundScan), sales from promotional situations such as these are not weighted, regardless of the retailer. SoundScan represents national sales and uses weighting to account for stores that aren't part of the system; promotional appearances by bands don't represent national phenomena (the band is only playing in one place at one time), so in this case, one sale equals one sale.

"If somebody were to try to do something like this, it doesn't make a great deal of sense because in the end the truth has a funny way of coming out," Sisco says. "Eventually somebody does the finances. Any benefit you might be able to get, which is insignificant and I don't think happens very often, [is negated] at the end of the day. The poor band just hurts itself."

SoundScan, which keeps its weighting and security information a secret, adjusts sales figures accordingly if it discovers infractions. Trio labelmates Rocket From The Crypt dealt with that firsthand after the release of their second record on Interscope, *RFTC*. SoundScan invalidated some of their sales for similar practices Vagrant uses. Many labels avoid the situation entirely, but the practice is thought to be commonplace among big (especially major) labels.

"It's unethical and gives everyone a false impression of how many records have been sold," says Fat Wreck Chords owner and NOFX frontman Fat Mike. "It's a typical major-label practice but

not a punk one. I don't really give a fuck about SoundScan. NOFX has a gold record, and it never hit the *Billboard* Top 200."

Epitaph Records, which quickly became one of the largest labels in punk after the Offspring broke into the mainstream in 1994, would agree with Fat Mike. "We do have bands that do in-stores, but we really don't look at the fact that the store is weighted," says Hector Martinez, tour publicist for the label. "As far as SoundScan goes, and as far as the store selling CDs at venues, that doesn't happen . . . Basically, we just give the CDs to the bands because they need all the fucking money."

Many people in the music industry argue your actual sales are usually higher than what SoundScan reports—but just as many argue the complete opposite. Egan claims he's just balancing it all out. He's not the only one.

"It is a really good business move," says Promise Ring guitarist Jason Gnewikow, who's never used the system, but supports it all the same.

"Really, they're taking advantage of the big, bad music industry. I don't think it's particularly underhanded or sleazy. It's not like paying radio stations to play your music. People are still buying your records because they want to buy it. It's just that you're consolidating the buy the first week it comes out to make it count."

That's exactly what the Alkaline Trio and Vagrant managed to do. *From Here To Infirmary* debuted in the *Billboard* Top 200, and the Trio enjoyed a heightened profile thanks in part to their increase in "scanned" sales. *Spin* ran a full-page feature on the band, and, just as they had requested, they landed a spot opening up arenas for Blink-182. For Matt Skiba, their increasing success was a dream come true.

"I was bike messenger for three-and-a-half years, and I had dropped out of school to start this band," he says. "I always said to myself, as I was waking up at six in the morning to go ride my bike through 30 below or whatever, 'If one day I could be in a band and that was my job, I don't think anything would ever bother me.'" He laughs. "And it's kind of true."

Shortly after *From Here To Infirmary*'s April, 2001 release, the band headlined two sold-out shows at the Metro in Chicago, complete with a floor-to-ceiling banner of the band's heart and skull logo on the stage, dramatic lighting and a surprise appearance by Chris Carrabba of Dashboard Confessional (another Vagrant band). The Trio greeted the crowd wearing matching outfits, and from the opening note, everyone sang along so loudly you could hardly hear Skiba himself. There was no denying that Vagrant's

audience had found the Trio.

In the coming weeks, Skiba would call Vagrant "the best label in the world." Just a few months later, though, Skiba would fire Egan and ask to leave the label that had brought him there.

## Like the Alkaline Trio, Hey Mercedes would find themselves in a Vagrant quagmire,

though for different reasons and under different circumstances—but ones that were far more threatening to the band's livelihood.

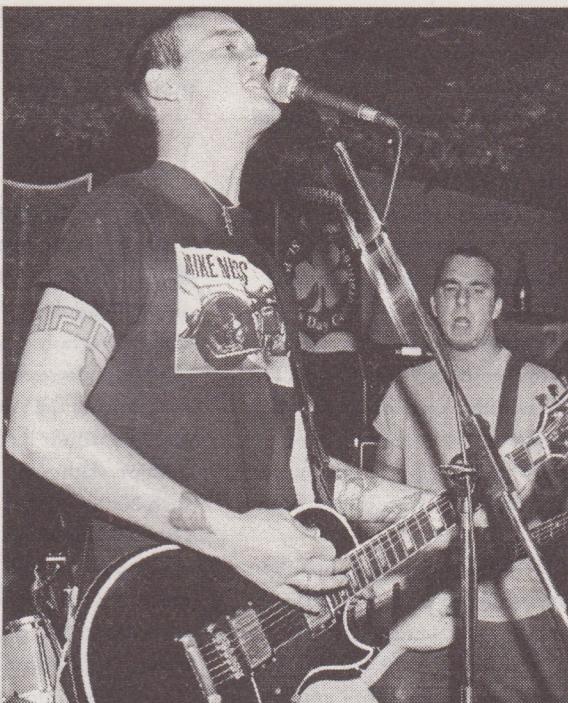


photo by Shawn Scullen

"I was bike messenger for three-and-a-half years, and I had dropped out of school to start this band," says the **Alkaline Trio's** Matt Skiba. "I always said to myself, as I was waking up at six in the morning to go ride my bike through 30 below or whatever, 'If one day I could be in a band and that was my job, I don't think anything would ever bother me.'"

The Chicago/Milwaukee-based band formed shortly after the 1999 breakup of Braid, in which three of Hey Mercedes' four members played. Although the continually touring Braid was a bastion of the

the rocky rise of vagrant records

Midwest scene, the band experienced limited growth, and in its later days sought to rectify that. Braid's label, Polyvinyl Records, entered into a production and distribution (P&D) deal with distributor Southern Records, which would allow their records to reach more people. Although the band's final record, *Frame and Canvas*, sold well, Matt Lunsford of Polyvinyl feels that Southern failed to follow through on its end of the agreement. Many records were sold, though Braid and Polyvinyl saw few returns because of it.

Such fiascoes understandably affected the formation of Hey Mercedes. The band that wanted "bigger" with Braid would make sure that "bigger" is what they got this time around. There was just the matter of taking that step.

In June of 2000, Hey Mercedes recorded a four-song EP and contacted Polyvinyl about releasing it. It would be the last record the two would do together. "We made the decision way back that we weren't going to do anything with them," Lunsford says. "We did the EP as friends, but that was it. It was very obvious that they wanted to go to a bigger label."

The self-titled EP served as not only an introduction to the band but as a sort of hors d'oeuvre for prospective labels. Vagrant's Santa Monica address was just one of many on the promotional kits the group's drummer and de facto manager Damon Atkinson planned to send out. But Vagrant beat the band to the punch—Vagrant's Kusatsu called Hey Mercedes before the label received the EP.

Such pre-emptive interest by a growing label in a band that had little to show for itself was more than enough to perk up Hey Mercedes' ears. "At the time, we weren't looking for hundreds of thousands of dollars," Atkinson explains. "We were looking to spend a couple of weeks in the studio with the kind of people we wanted to record with. If we were on Vagrant, we knew we could accomplish that."

According to Atkinson, Hey Mercedes had two goals at their genesis: First, "To create music that we all enjoy and we think people will enjoy" (i.e., a recording budget to create a record that wouldn't make them cringe later). Second, to "Give our music to those people" (i.e., a healthy distribution network with enough strength that you could find the record everywhere). Vagrant was certainly a label that could provide that, but by no means was it the *only* label.

Jade Tree Records seemed like a perfect home for Hey Mercedes. The label had released records by many of the group's peers (The Promise Ring, Euphone, Joan Of Arc) and was often regarded as a place where artists could grow naturally. But when Hey Mercedes had a meeting with Jade Tree to discuss things, label co-owner Tim Owen discovered they had different priorities. "There's certain things we're going to do and certain things we're not," he says. "We're very black and white about those things . . . It was like, 'OK, go to Vagrant.'"

And go to Vagrant they did. The members of Hey Mercedes, wary of—and weary from—the years of touring with Braid, wanted to be comfortable. Vagrant's seemingly deep pockets ensured that. "When Hey Mercedes came to us, they said that they came from a

really limiting scene," Egan recalls. "They weren't like, 'We need a platinum record! We need to be on MTV!' They just wanted to do something different."

Although Vagrant could provide major-label-like comforts, Hey Mercedes had their share of apprehensiveness about the major-label-like business practices used by the label, such as not being able to sell their record on tour, doing in-stores, and emphasizing SoundScan.

"That's one of the questions we had for them before we even signed," Atkinson says. "We asked about that stuff. That's something I've heard of major labels doing, and I don't look at Vagrant—and I never have looked at them—as a major. But it's definitely a step up from what we were used to."

In January of 2001, Hey Mercedes signed on with the label for three records. Vagrant planned a midsummer release for the band's first record, *Everynight Fire Works*, but it would not work out that way. Despite the comforts Vagrant could provide, the label ended up seriously complicating the band's life, both present and future.

**A**round the same time Hey Mercedes signed, Egan negotiated a distribution deal with the New York-based distro/record label TTV. The deal was for production and distribution of all Vagrant products. The agreement allowed Vagrant to still go through small indie distros if they liked—but those records would first be shipped through TTV.

Despite the rumors and the way they were reported by many punk webzines, Egan had not sold Vagrant's distribution rights to a major. Although TTV has released records by bands like Nine Inch Nails and Snoop Dogg, it is independently owned by Steve Gottlieb. Egan had actually walked away from a major label when he severed ties with Vagrant's old distributor, Caroline Records, which is owned by Virgin. (For the record, many of the labels that advertise in *Punk Planet* continue to use Caroline and, at one point, this magazine went through them.)

"They're not small by any means," Egan says of TTV. "But they're not a major label. TTV is owned by one person, and they go directly to stores, which is what I thought was so cool about them. It was why I wanted to do the deal with them."

With the TTV deal in place, Egan began devising ways to expand the label. At this point, Vagrant's roster had swelled to include 15 bands. Recent high-profile additions such as Rocket From The Crypt and Saves The Day brought even more attention to the label. Egan saw how crowds reacted to these bands across the country, and he devised a way to share that attention with the smaller bands in his stable: send everyone out on the road. Once again, he began to think bigger.

In the summer of 2001, Egan assembled the Vagrant America Tour: a nine-week, 52-date trek around the US, which, throughout various stops, would include every single Vagrant band. The shows would take place in larger clubs and would often spend three to four nights in bigger cities. To make it worth everyone's while,

Egan paid for a cavalcade of tour buses and put the bands up in hotels—all as nonrecoupable expenses. To help offset these costs, he began talking about a tour sponsor. For a while, it looked as if Egan had secured a deal with Red Bull (an energy drink manufactured by Coca-Cola), but it eventually fell through.

"All of our bands drink Red Bull, so I had no problem with that," Egan explains. "But we put the tour together so fast that we couldn't have a sponsor. With all of these multigazillion dollar companies, it takes seven months to work out a deal, and they want to know what your demographic is and whatever. So I just said 'Fuck it.'"

Not that sponsorships bothered any of the bands on the tour. Most of the groups were so excited by the idea that they began telling their friends a cell-phone company was going to endorse the tour. Others thought it was an internet provider. No one even mentioned Red Bull. In their excitement, the bands overlooked many of the people who helped get them to this point.

"It definitely bummed me out that the smaller bands on the label were doing this," says Sean Agnew, an independent promoter in Philadelphia. "The bands don't understand why this is a bad thing. They don't think it's weird at all. It makes you wonder, 'Do these bands see the people buying the music as people they respect, or is it a faceless group of people who they can get a couple dollars out of?'"

Sponsorships, tour buses, interest from Coca-Cola—it was all so new to Hey Mercedes. They had never had a distributor as large as TTV, nor had they ever played the type of shows Vagrant America could offer. But it was an exciting time for the band. They signed on to do a few weeks' worth of dates on the Vagrant America tour, beginning on July 23, 2001 with a four-day string of shows in Chicago with the Get Up Kids, Alkaline Trio and Saves The Day. A few weeks earlier, Saves The Day released their first album on Vagrant, *Stay What You Are*, and Hey Mercedes were now premiering songs from *Everynight Fire Works*.

For their four nights in town, the entire Vagrant staff flew in and reserved 22 rooms at the House of Blues hotel. For supporting both the hotel and club (where two of the four sold-out shows took place), the staff at House Of Blues combed Egan and Cohen the hotel's expansive presidential suite. When reporter Greg Kot showed up at their door to write a piece on the label's "victory lap"—as he later penned in *Rolling Stone*—he found Egan and company to be overjoyed.

"There was sort of a sense of euphoria about the whole thing," Kot remembers. "I think they were even surprised. I saw their faces when they opened the door to this presidential suite, and they were like, 'Jeez, this isn't too punk rock, is it?'"

Just three days later, Egan and the staff would call the members of Hey Mercedes into the room and break the news to them: Vagrant had been sued by TTV for breach of contract, Hey Mercedes' record would have to be pushed back indefinitely, and Vagrant would effectively be closing its doors. After the Chicago shows, Egan would fly home to LA to deal with the proceedings. He took down the label's website and called his lawyers. For four days in Chicago, Vagrant seemed like the biggest indie label in the world. In reality, it was falling apart.



photo by Shawn Scallen

**J**ust three days later, Egan and the staff would call the members of **Hey Mercedes** into the room and break the news to them: Vagrant had been sued by TTV for breach of contract, Hey Mercedes' record would have to be pushed back indefinitely, and Vagrant would effectively be closing its doors.

**E**gan didn't stay in LA for long. On August 14, he and Cohen flew to New York and checked into the SoHo Grand Hotel in Manhattan. For the next three weeks, Egan would live out of a hotel room on West Broadway and Canal. His wife and kids would wait it out back home. Next to his father dying, Egan says it was the worst experience of his life. "I was just miserable," he says with a sigh. "It's what I imagine going through chemotherapy is like. It was just a nightmare."

The lawsuit TTV filed against Vagrant

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had been a long time coming. The trouble began when Vagrant's bands started selling an unbelievable amount of records a few months into their deal with TTVT. Gottlieb originally picked up Vagrant as more of a development deal. He never expected Vagrant to sell as many records as it had in the first six months out of the gate. The fact that they allowed Vagrant to sell to indie distributors became a painful oversight and TTVT wanted to reign those sales back in.

"TTVT decided that those distributors were selling too many of our records," Egan explains, "even though TTVT was selling twice the amount of our records that they projected themselves to sell. They not only wanted twice as many, but they wanted what the indies were selling too. And I just refused to do it."

Egan was in a bind. During the first six months of the year, Vagrant had sold nearly 200,000 records, but it would be another three months before TTVT paid a dime on anything. The only money Vagrant had coming in was from indie distros, who paid on 30-day cycles. If they gave that up, they'd have no revenue for the next three months and would have to refinance the label so that it could survive TTVT's nine-month payment schedule. Egan flat out refused TTVT's request to renegotiate indie sales.

The only release Vagrant had scheduled during these negotiations was *Stay What You Are* by Saves The Day. Once again, Egan set his sights high. Vagrant planned to ship 75,000 copies of the record its first week. If TTVT were planning to use any of Vagrant's forthcoming releases as leverage in these negotiations, this would be it. Egan believed that TTVT was planning to cease production on the record as a way to get Vagrant to submit to their demands. He also believed that they would hold all payments on records sold until things were settled. While this would have been an effective way to get Vagrant to renegotiate their contract, there is no real way to confirm or deny if this was actually the plan. When asked by *Punk Planet* for comment, TTVT chose not to address these accusations directly, instead issuing an e-mail statement about their relationship with Vagrant.

"We have never done anything but scrupulously honor our deal with Vagrant and look out for the best interest of their exceptional roster of artists," reads the statement. "No one was dreaming about offering Vagrant millions of dollars when we did our deal; otherwise Rich obviously would have taken it. Rich Egan seems anxious to leave his punk lifestyle at the office and otherwise live like a millionaire."

Worried about the negotiations with TTVT and how they would affect his plans for *Stay What You Are*, Egan began meeting with Jay Faires, the owner of JCOR Entertainment. JCOR offered something TTVT didn't: major-label distribution through Interscope. Egan began talking to Faires about setting up a P&D deal for Vagrant, one similar to his agreement with TTVT—but, in this case, the ties to a major were *real*.

Faires and Egan quickly reached an understanding and in June of 2001, Egan handed JCOR the distribution rights to the upcoming Saves The Day and Hey Mercedes records. Before making a deal with JCOR, Egan called all his bands to let them know what was taking place. He also asked Gottlieb to match the con-

tract Faires had presented to him. Vagrant's contract with TTVT included a matching clause, which meant if TTVT wanted to hold on to the label, they'd have to meet any offer that came across Egan's desk. But they didn't touch the JCOR deal.

"I told TTVT, 'OK match it,'" Egan says. "They said they didn't have to match it, and I was like, 'Yes you do! It's right there in the contract!' They kept saying that they didn't have to, so I turned in the Saves The Day record to JCOR, and they sued us."

In actuality, TTVT had every right to sue Egan. He had backed out of their contract prematurely and allowed another corporation to distribute his records. What he did directly violated the contract he had signed just a few months earlier—and it could take months to reconcile the matter. As often the case with Egan, his drive for success had taken over. This time, however, it could have come with the highest price tag of them all: It could have cost him the label.

"The night before the trial was supposed to start, Jon had finished running the numbers for the end of the year, and given all the legal costs, it was looking bleak," Egan recalls. "We figured, win or lose, if the trial dragged on, it would've put us out of business."

To make matters worse, all production of Vagrant releases by TTVT would freeze until a verdict was reached—as the trial began, it looked like it could take more than 10 months. Although JCOR had agreed to distribute the next record on Vagrant's schedule, *Everynight Fire Works*, they backed out of the agreement due to the lawsuit. (JCOR would close its doors six months later, and Interscope would inherit the rights to the Saves The Day record.)

Vagrant originally planned to release *Everynight Fire Works* on August 7. Hey Mercedes had even booked two full US tours to support the record, including a high-profile run with Jimmy Eat World. All the band could do was perform songs from a record that could not yet legally exist.

"If that was my band, I'd be like, 'Fuck this, man,'" says the Alkaline Trio's Matt Skiba. "'Give us the record. We're out of here!'"

Hey Mercedes could have done exactly that. Their contract stipulated that the record had to be released within 90 days of the label receiving the materials. The lawsuit technically put Vagrant into a breach of contract, which did not escape the eyes of Richard Grabel, the band's attorney. He suggested the band change the release window on their contract with Vagrant to protect themselves, because they still didn't have a release date. Although receiving a letter from another lawyer when the label was already fighting a lawsuit did not go over well, the band did have the contract amended. But they still didn't have a record.

"I thought it was really suspect that Vagrant had created all this hype about their bands and their label, but what's the point if you can't even get your records out?" asks Polyvinyl's Matt Lunsford, citing Hey Mercedes' tour with Jimmy Eat World as an example. "When you look at Vagrant, all the bands on the label had to go on a roller-coaster ride with them."

With the possibility of a 10-month roller-coaster ride on the horizon, even Egan began looking at the label as a sinking ship. "As a manager, I would have taken my bands to a different label once Vagrant got caught up in a legal battle like

that," he admits. "We would have been tied up in court for 10 months. That's 10 months of not putting out records. It would have been 10 months in court before I 'won,' but by then I would have looked up and all of my bands would have left my label."

On August 15, the New York Supreme Court heard opening statements from TTVT, Egan, Cohen and JCOR. The justice overseeing the case, Herman Cahn, immediately sent the case into mediation and suspended all Vagrant activity. For the next three weeks, the future of Vagrant Records was put on hold while all three parties met behind closed doors for eight hours a day. Nothing could be said of what transpired inside those meetings, not even to Egan's bands. The forced silence destabilized what was already a shaky situation for Vagrant Records.

Egan ended up owing TTVT nothing, but the lawsuit cost him thousands of dollars in legal fees and left him drained emotionally. On September 9, Vagrant and TTVT finally reached an agreement. A long-form contract was drawn up guaranteeing Vagrant the exact same deal they had originally signed on for with TTVT. But the damage was already done. "I never wanted to leave TTVT," Egan insists. "I just wanted to get paid and have them live under the terms of our deal. So they agreed to do that, but it cost me an untold amount of money in legal fees. We got back everything from TTVT to begin with, so it turned out great. But it could've been disastrous."

**N**ot that life would get much easier. By the time Rich Egan returned to LA following the trial, the Alkaline Trio was one of the biggest bands on Vagrant. The group, admittedly, owed much of this to Egan. After all, Egan had gotten the Blink-182 tour for the Trio and helped land them in the *Billboard* Top 200. With that, life changed for the band. They went from touring in dilapidated vans to posh tour buses, and from making a few hundred dollars a night to a couple thousand.

Throughout this, Skiba tried to keep his two worlds in check: the world he came from and the world where he found himself. The Trio would still try to play all-ages, DIY clubs when they could—even if it meant parking an enormous tour bus outside of a punk Mecca like 924 Gilman Street in Berkeley—but it had become more and more apparent to Matt Skiba that there was no going home. The Alkaline Trio had outgrown its punk-rock confines, leaving Skiba thoroughly confused.

"We never really expected to be a popular band," Skiba says. "When that happened, we had a small amount of trouble handling it . . . Not that we didn't want to be a popular band, but when that

happens, a lot more things happen. A lot more things have to get taken care of, and we were concerned that they weren't. So, I made hasty decisions and made decisions that I regret."

By September of 2001, those hasty decisions would include firing their drummer, the group's publicist, and their booking agent (who was also one of Skiba's best friends). He would also fire Rich Egan as manager of the Alkaline Trio. Horror stories about working with Vagrant and Egan flowed in from sources the Trio trusted. Also, because of the lawsuit, the Trio found themselves on tour without CDs to sell and



**T**he night before the trial was supposed to start, Jon had finished running the numbers for the end of the year, and given all the legal costs, it was looking bleak," Rich Egan recalls. "We figured, win or lose, if the trial dragged on, it would've put us out of business."

no label owner to smooth things over. The fact that neither Egan nor Cohen could really discuss the case, even with their bands, fed their unease. Vagrant Records, once the full-service label, was now quite the opposite—and Skiba wanted nothing to do with it. Shortly thereafter, he would tell Egan he wanted to leave the label.

"This is the kind of situation where you learn who your friends are," Egan says. "I think that as the success came, [Skiba] had a lot of people talking in his ear, telling him he wasn't punk rock or that he wasn't whatever. And, for a short period there, he listened to them."

Egan, who had been understanding when the band sought a new manager, was incensed by the Trio's desire to leave the

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label. Such rifts happen all the time between label owners and bands, but seldom does the rest of the world get to sit in on the argument.

It started October 15, 2001, on the popular indie music website *Buddyhead*. The site's gossip section, which receives a substantial number of hits per month, featured a vituperative rant about Vagrant. Such diatribes are common on *Buddyhead*, but this was lengthier and more cryptic than most.

In it, *Buddyhead*'s Travis Keller blasted Vagrant for its SoundScan manipulation and its extravagant expenditures that would have to be recouped, especially by "certain bands" that had "made moves to sever their management deal with the label." Keller also criticized the label for bragging about how much money it made to Greg Kot in *Rolling Stone*, while flying the indie flag and ignoring the people responsible for the label's unprecedented sales. Although he mentioned no band names, anyone familiar with the situation knew Keller was referring to the Trio. Egan, already feeling betrayed by the band, felt even worse because of this very public airing of dirty laundry. So he decided to write Skiba a letter.

The next day, Egan e-mailed Skiba a long, angry message. Skiba claims he never received it, but just about everyone else in the world did. Deciphering how that happened is like trying to figure out Watergate, replete with conspiracy theories, shifting alliances, and old-fashioned gossip.

The message contained a host of damning accusations (including a reference to an upcoming "evil Vagrant Empire" story in *Punk Planet*) and revealed some startling new information. Egan discussed the Trio's alleged attempt to leave Vagrant for Fat Wreck Chords, the massive debt the band owed to both Egan and Vagrant, and how he felt abandoned by the band during the TTV lawsuit. Aside from an odd reference to the possibility of Vagrant taking \$15 million from TTV, it was mostly personal. From Rich Egan, the message went to Matt Skiba's address and the address of the Trio's new manager, Erik Anderson. That's where all certainty ends and the speculation begins about how this very personal e-mail ended up being read by thousands of people.

One theory holds that Egan also blind carbon copied the message to Travis Keller, as a sort of "this is what's really happening" retaliation. The message never appeared on *Buddyhead*'s gossip page, but it did appear on numerous message boards, including Vagrant's.

Both Egan and Skiba blame Jessica Hopper, former publicist for the Alkaline Trio (and current writer and publicist for *Punk Planet*), for the wide distribution of the message. Hopper's termination in the spring of 2001 was the first in the series of firings by Skiba. In the e-mail, Egan refers to Hopper as a "back-stabbing scener," fueling suspicions that she sent out the message to retaliate. Although Hopper admits to forwarding the message to a handful of people (something she later apologized for), she insists she played a relatively small part in the e-mail's proliferation.

"I got that e-mail third hand, still with the Vagrant and

*Buddyhead* addresses on it," she says, maintaining that *Buddyhead* received a copy of the message. "For Rich Egan to pass the buck on to me is ridiculous and not even worth my time."

Even if Skiba and Egan believed that, they would still maintain a third party edited the message before sending it out. One version that Egan saw of the letter ended abruptly at the wrong place.

"It was my understanding that somebody went into my e-mail account and took this e-mail, and when it actually got out, it wasn't even the original e-mail that Rich had sent out," Skiba says. "It seemed like there were embellishments. I never saw the thing, so I can't really say." Regardless, Skiba insists that there were "some things that were completely out of left field" in the e-mail, particularly the comments about the Trio leaving Vagrant for Fat Wreck Chords.

Both Egan and Fat Mike tell a different story. While they now agree that Fat Wreck Chords was not attempting to poach the Trio from Vagrant, the label had talked to the band about doing a 7" for the label's single-of-the-month club. That was the extent of it, according to Fat Mike, because Fat Wreck has stringent rules prohibiting approaching bands on other labels.

"Then a few months ago, Matt asked me if I would ever be interested in putting out an Alkaline Trio record," Mike says. "I told him if and when your deal is up with Vagrant, we can talk, but right now, I wouldn't be interested . . . I think that Matt just wanted to know that he had a place to go if things didn't work out on Vagrant."

After the e-mail went public, both Vagrant and the Alkaline Trio went into full-throttle damage control, but negative comments about the label appeared on numerous websites and message boards. Vagrant, with its burgeoning success, became an easy target, especially once rumors of impropriety began to spread.

Life for Vagrant toward the end of 2001 emphasized how much the lawsuit and other matters had taxed the bands and staff of the label. The e-mail blunder gave the world a window into it all.

"I think it's just like any relationship—you fight," says *Buddyhead*'s Keller. "People just happened to get a peak at someone's inner-relationship bout. And that wasn't really fair. I think that if we hadn't posted some of the stuff we did, the Alkaline Trio wouldn't [still] be on Vagrant, so in a way I think we helped things out a little there." Such contradictory statements exemplify the debacle well.

Once the dust settled, Skiba and Egan reconciled, with plans for an upcoming Alkaline Trio record intact. "Me and Rich both have the tendency to be pretty heated people and, sometimes, recently at each other," Skiba says. "But I think through that we've become better friends. Sometimes everything has to get blown to shit before it can be rebuilt, and I think that's what happened."

**D**uring all of this, Vagrant's bands still managed to sell an unbelievable amount of records. When *Everynight Fire Works* was finally released on October 23,

sales went better than expected; within a few months, Hey Mercedes' debut had sold close to 30,000 copies. *From Here To Infirmary* survived the drama too, and became the Alkaline Trio's best-selling disc, at 80,000 copies sold.

Most surprising of all was Saves The Day. When Vagrant released *Stay What You Are* on July 10, 2001, it managed to sell 15,000 copies its first week and debuted on the *Billboard* Top 100. It was an impressive feat—but by the time Saves The Day completed a second tour in support of the record this past December, the album had sold 10 times that, clearing 150,000 copies sold. It was the same plateau the Get Up Kids had reached just a year earlier, the only difference being that Saves The Day was able to do it in six months. Even within the Vagrant camp, the record's success has been startling.

"I don't understand it," says Saves The Day singer/songwriter Chris Conley. "I'm not sure I want to understand it. But for some reason it's happening, and we didn't really have a say in the matter. It just seems to have a life of its own."

When the group signed to Vagrant in the summer of 2000, they had completed several nationwide tours and released two albums for the East Coast hardcore label Equal Vision. The records were received fairly well: 1998's *Can't Slow Down* had sold just under 10,000 copies and 1999's *Through Being Cool* had maxed out at around 40,000 sold. While these were small figures by major-label standards, they were strong numbers of an indie label and A&R reps began courting the band. Warner Brothers and DreamWorks made offers and Blink-182's Tom Delongé even called Conley on the behalf of Blink's label, MCA. In the end, Saves The Day chose Vagrant.

"Equal Vision was our label at the time, consisting of about three employees," Conley says. "So to jump right to a major would have been too overwhelming, and much, much too stupid. Vagrant just felt right."

For Conley, the bottom line was that he didn't trust the majors. Saves The Day was downright petrified by the thought of signing to a major ("sick to our bellies," as Conley puts it). They had heard the horror stories of bands being shelved by their label or being forced to do things that had nothing to do with their art. In Vagrant, they saw a way out. No one at Vagrant would get shelved, and no one would be forced to do embarrassing rounds of promotion—at least that's the way they understood it. So Saves The Day signed on with Vagrant and hired Egan as their manager.

The loss of Saves The Day was a difficult blow for Equal Vision owner Steve Ready, who not only offered the same distribution (at the time, both labels went through Caroline) but

matched the offer Egan had made the group. Saves The Day believed in Egan, though. Where he saw bigger as better, they saw a brightly lit future.

"I was disappointed when Saves The Day left," Ready admits. "This gets competitive. It hurts. I feel like I took them from nothing, and they're thankful, but I didn't want to lose them."

A few months later, the band traveled to LA to record *Stay What You Are* with Foo Fighters/Elliott Smith producer Rob Schnapf. "When they came back, they told me that they thought they could sell 500,000 copies of a Vagrant record," Ready says. "And I was just like, 'Wow! He told them that?' I thought it was weird



photo by Jeremy Michael Weiss

**S**aves The Day appeared to be everywhere following the release of *Stay What You Are*, and the attention would help considerably. It was a publicity routine typical of major labels, but now an independent punk label had replicated it to perfection.

because he had never sold 500,000 copies of one record. I don't think he's done it yet. Obviously he had some kind of indication that he would have a chance to do that."

To achieve this, Egan went all out. His use of major-label distribution through JCOR/Interscope helped strengthen the record's presence. Soon Saves The Day shot a video for the album's first single, "At Your Funeral," and Vagrant managed to secure regular broadcasting on both MTV and MTV2. To help boost interest in the single, Saves The Day played a select

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amount of radio-sponsored festivals around Christmas time. They also played the song on *Late Night With Conan O'Brien*. The cover of *Alternative Press* was next. Like the Get Up Kids, a high-profile tour with Weezer followed.

As a result of this marketing blitz, Saves The Day appeared to be everywhere following the release of *Stay What You Are*, and the attention would help considerably. It was a publicity routine typical of major labels, but now an independent punk label had replicated it to perfection.

"The only problem I have with majors is the way they conduct business," says Sean Agnew. "They're there to make money. Vagrant is actually a label that puts the music ahead of the money, but they are doing business practices that are set up to compete with majors . . . And I don't think that playing those games is helping anyone in the long run."

**B**y the end of the year, Vagrant was looking more and more like a major. They capped off 2001 with two notable signings: Face To Face and Paul Westerberg. Although Face To Face had a long-standing relationship with Vagrant, they had never recorded a proper album for the label (their first studio album on Vagrant, *How to Ruin Everything*, was released in April of this year). Like Face to Face, most of Paul Westerberg's career had been spent on a major label. But Egan's ability to break a relatively unknown band like Saves The Day made him appealing.

"I just want to provide a safe place to make records for bands, as well as a place where bands can grow," Egan contends. "I think we can and will have gold records on Vagrant. I don't think there's anything wrong with that. I don't feel bad about having that as a goal. I think that if the bands feel that they can get that without compromising all of the things you have to compromise when you're on a major label, then that's a pretty good place to make music."

That's not to say that compromises haven't been made. While 2001 may have been a banner year for Saves The Day, it was a bit of a letdown for their labelmates No Motiv. Although they were one of the first bands signed to Vagrant, No Motiv watched their second album, *Diagram For Healing*, get lost in the shuffle. It was released three months before Saves The Day's *Stay What You Are*, but there was no high-profile press campaign behind *Diagram For Healing*. No video. No live appearance on *Late Night With Conan O'Brien*. What Egan had pushed so adamantly on Saves The Day was barely even mentioned to No Motiv. Not that they had any moral objections to those things—it just was never in the cards.

"I want to make a video so bad," says the group's drummer Patrick Pedraza. "I want to be on the radio, too. We just never got the chance to. I see what's going on with the label, because when I turn on MTV2, I'll see a Saves The Day video. We want that. We want lots of exposure. We don't care. But we can't make the video. We can't call radio stations and force people to play our song."

Rich has to. It's up to him."

Pedraza still lives at home with his parents and works a day job. Promotion has essentially stopped on *Diagram For Healing*, at least in the band's eyes. "We're basically getting shelved right now," Pedraza says. "I don't see anyone pushing the record."

If that's true, it would seem to be another step by Egan to replicate the business practices of a major. For the most part, major labels determine how they're going to push and support an artist by their first quarter sales (that is, how many records they've sold in the record's first three months). In the case of Saves The Day, they sold more than 100,000 records in their first quarter—far more than any other band on Vagrant. No Motiv sold close to 10,000 copies. That's less than *Stay What You Are* did in its first week.

"When we started this band, we wanted to sell a million records," Pedraza admits. "But we've just ended up struggling. It's tough. I don't think we can do it on Vagrant. There's so many bands on the label that are good, but I wish we could be up there with them."

By year's end, No Motiv began looking for a new label. They are rumored to be talking with majors. Truth is, they may have just stepped away from one.

**I**n all likelihood, Vagrant Records will no longer be an independent label by the time you read this. Word of behind-the-scenes maneuvering to make a deal date as far back as Vagrant America's summer stop in Chicago; when he sat down with reporter Greg Kot, Egan mentioned that something was in the works, though the specifics were still uncertain.

The many expenses that had become a regular part of Vagrant's routine began adding up. Despite sold-out shows in nearly every city, the Vagrant America tour cost Vagrant thousands of dollars. By promising all of the bands their normal nightly guarantees—as well as picking up the tab for the tour's convoy of semis and buses—the label never stood a chance of turning a profit. The TVT lawsuit followed. Then Egan signed Paul Westerberg and began churning out videos for his higher profile bands. It all began bearing down.

Suddenly, Vagrant, the same label that wooed bands like the Get Up Kids and Saves The Day away from majors, was talking about selling a piece of itself off to them. Egan insists he's not buying into the major-label mindset—he's merely trying to keep his doors open.

"This isn't pro-major label," he says. "I've been vocal about hating major labels too. I just have to think on a much broader scale. I have 14 employees, 17 bands, and people are making this their livelihood. I want to make this a label that bands don't see as a stepping stone. I want the bands here to achieve their goals—whether that's selling 10 thousand records or 10 million."

Ideally, if Egan accepted a deal, no one, other than he or Cohen, would own more than 49 percent of Vagrant. TVT

would still distribute their records. No bands would become property of any other label (as is often the case with subsidiary deals), and, by no means, would the major have a say as to what happens with the bands on Vagrant. As Egan puts it, "If we sign with a major label, none of our bands are going to feel like they're on a major label."

It's hard to believe that any label would be interested in such a deal, but Egan began meeting rather frequently in February of this year with two majors: Interscope and Warner Brothers. Interscope seems to be the obvious choice since Egan already deals with the label for the *Saves The Day* record. Although he can't say for sure, he admits to meeting with both labels, adding rather cryptically, "Fuck, man, who knows?"

What Egan will disclose is that he has been meeting with these labels in order to help aid Vagrant's financial state. "That's the reason I'm listening more intently right now," he admits. "Expectations are higher now—that's within the label and with the bands. And it takes money to fulfill expectations. The one thing I'm not going to do is close my doors. If I had to take money from a major label, I'd take money from a major label. It's that simple. Is that my ideal situation? Absolutely not."

But that's the situation Egan is in—and, really, it's one he's created for himself. Typically, Egan has his hopes set high. "I may be the eternal optimist, but I'd rather be a catalyst for change," Egan enthuses. "I hope that rather than becoming a part of the system, we'll change the system."

**C**hange will be the only certainty in Vagrant's future. Egan hopes the Vagrant America 2 tour he's planning could be a catalyst for such change, causing other high-profile tours to pay bands what they're worth. Ideology aside, the sequel tour will definitely have some differences from its predecessor when it hits the road this summer—and eschews the a-level clubs for b-level arenas. Last year's tour, which lasted nine weeks compared to this year's four, mainly played 1,500-capacity clubs, which promptly sold out weeks before the show, thus locking out more than a handful of fans. Logistically, the tour can't play multiple shows in every city, so Egan made the decision to look at 5,000 to 7,000 seat venues. The idea has generated resounding apprehensiveness, even from Vagrant's bands. On a rational level, it makes complete sense—but there are other levels, too.

Arenas of that size typically have exclusive licensing agreements with entertainment conglomerates like Clear Channel. Those agreements, besides being expensive for bands and labels, mean you're tied to Clear Channel's security, overhead, and ticket-selling methods. Efficiently cut from the loop are independent booking agents and clubs, the very people who would usually put on shows by these bands. Security guards. Parking fees. Seats. These aren't exactly the sorts of things that come to mind when you think of a punk show.

"They're not playing to a bunch of people they can talk and connect with," says Sean Agnew, noting the loss of intimacy.



photo by Shawn Scallen

**A** lot of those bands, they want to be huge," says **Rocket From the Crypt's** John Reis of his fellow Vagrant bands. "And Vagrant probably, again this is just speculation, I don't think they want to lose those bands, so it's either lose them to a major label or try to keep up with them and keep up with their demands—which is 'More exposure! We want more radio! We want to fucking do this! We want to do that!'"

"They're just playing to faces. They go backstage, drink and load out. It's just like a rock band."

To help defray the additional costs, sponsorships, only discussed during the first Vagrant America tour, will be a reality this summer. Says Egan, "I don't have a problem with sponsorships. If people want to use us as

the rocky rise of vagrant records

a vehicle to get out their product, and it's a product the bands believe in and that we believe in, then that's fine."

Taking sponsorships for an arena tour is a dramatic change from where the label was just a few years ago. Not surprisingly, there's a growing concern about the repercussions of Vagrant's rapid growth—both for the bands and labels beneath them. "I can't be responsible for what the rest of the scene has to deal with," Egan says dryly. "I can just treat my bands the best that I can."

Indeed, a certain paternalistic philanthropy permeates how he runs his record label: buses for safer traveling; nonrecoupable expenditures for advertisements; significant losses on the first Vagrant tour so the bands could earn what they "deserve"; business deals with bigger labels to get the records everywhere; and so on. "Call me overly ambitious, but I've wanted this label to be a home for artists," Egan says. "I'd love to go platinum. I make no secrets about that. As long as we keep doing it our way, I say we should be as big as we can be. But more importantly, I'd like our bands to be as big as they can."

Vagrant doesn't have to worry about being too small anymore. If anything, they have to worry about getting too big. After two years of extreme ups and downs, Egan is facing the ultimate repercussion of his desire to succeed: having to deal with that success. In reality, Egan can't possibly keep up with Vagrant's demands without some sort of major-label investment. It's exactly the sort of thing that has haunted him for the past two years. He starts simple, grows bigger but then pushes things further. The bigger the better, until something goes pop. Inking a deal with a major could be the next step—or it could be the biggest mistake in the world. But, probably sooner rather than later, it's a decision Egan will have to make.

"A lot of those bands, they want to be huge," says John Reis of his fellow Vagrant bands. "And Vagrant probably, again this is just speculation, I don't think they want to lose those bands, so it's either lose them to a major label or try to keep up with them and keep up with their demands—which is 'More exposure! We want more radio! We want to fucking do this! We want to do that!'"

Egan could easily lose a few of his biggest bands. The Get Up Kids have never ruled out another run at the majors, and Saves The Day could currently option out of their contract if they were offered the right deal. Rocket From The Crypt could do the same thing if Vagrant ended up going into business with Interscope—the very major label that dropped Rocket a couple of years ago.

"Oh no no no," Reis says emphatically when asked about working with Interscope again. "That wouldn't happen. If they hooked up with someone, we could get out."

It's true: Between their (Vagrant-funded) private recording studio and Reis' label, Swami (which he does with Jon Cohen), Rocket is pretty self-sufficient.

Bands that need a label, though, especially a big label, might find it hard not to stay. But, in the long run, Vagrant's indie-major status still doesn't match a real major, especially when bands have stars in their eyes.

"I think that people have to realize that, at some point, all of these guys want to be rock stars," says Greg Kot. "I'm not sure if Ben Weasel [of Screeching Weasel] wants to be a rock star, but I'm pretty sure that all the guys in Saves The Day have thought about it . . . Here's these guys playing indie rock, and they're talking like business majors."

Such thinking hardly comes from Vagrant bands alone; bands are inherently more in tune with the music business now. Publishing deals, SoundScan, and sponsorships weren't even in the vocabulary of the first few waves of punk bands. But when that sales-driven focus starts to push bands to take business into the realm of art, their actions will reflect it, according to indie iconoclast Steve Albini.

"All of these little decisions that bands make, they do make it out of the speakers," Albini says. "They make it out into the audience when they're playing on stage. All of these decisions betray their character; everyone can pick up on it. Everyone can smell a corpse in your house, honest."

With Vagrant's spending habits hanging over them, more than a few label owners say they've begun to re-evaluate their business practices. "It's a wake-up call," says Steve Ready. "There is something above us, so we have to try and hold on to what we have and make it a little better so we're attractive to a band, too."

Jade Tree's Tim Owen concurs: "Obviously what has happened with a lot of these labels, it's made us evaluate *what* we're doing and *why* we're doing it. But it's continued to make sense to go the way we've been going, because we're in no hurry to become a huge label. We want to be around."

Asian Man Records, already a "small, small, small" label by Park's admission, has no desire to stay on par with other, bigger labels, either. "I think it has made me even want to do less as a label," Park says. "[It] may sound strange, but I really think in the last year, I've just said to myself, 'Screw it.' This has nothing to do with what I am as a person, and I refuse to give in to the demands of the bands."

Instead of becoming the rulebook for some of these labels, Vagrant has been seen as the indie-label antithesis, the company that sold it all for an easy dollar. How does that Radiohead song go? "Ambition makes you look pretty ugly?" Even some of the artists on Vagrant have begun to see things that way. "It's a shame," John Reis says. "Because with that ambition and that trying to keep up with the Joneses comes a certain amount of pressure to sell records."

A look at the history books clearly shows that growth that comes quickly often comes at a very destructive price: Lookout Records encountered an identity crisis when millions of dollars started pouring in after Green Day got big; Sub Pop is still fighting bankruptcy despite making millions off of Nirvana; Epitaph struggled after making truckloads of money from the Offspring, NOFX, and Rancid.

"A lot of the slapstick punk rock labels that happened to luck out and sell a few hundred thousand records and are behaving in this sort of clamp-down manner, they're not going to last that

long," Albini warns. "They might make some money for a while, but they're going to chase all the squirrels out of the tree, and they're going to be left with nothing."

**A** few weeks after his first meeting with *Punk Planet*, Egan is once again sitting around that small wooden table in the middle of his office, giving it another go. He's busy explaining why he's chosen to be a source for this article—why, in the face of such scrutiny, he's talking to *Punk Planet*. At times he must feel like he's setting himself up for one hell of a slam job—but the way he sees it, this is the only way to set the record straight. When Egan says that these bands and this label are all that matter to him, he truly sounds like he means it. But few people want to hear that part of the story. Maybe this really is the only way he can set the record straight.

"If I don't say my side of the story, someone else will make it up for me," he insists. "It doesn't matter to me what *Punk Planet* thinks or what *Rolling Stone* thinks. It's just like how it doesn't matter to me what the scene police think about me. I do care what people think about the bands on the label, because I care if kids give them the respect that they deserve for the art that they make."

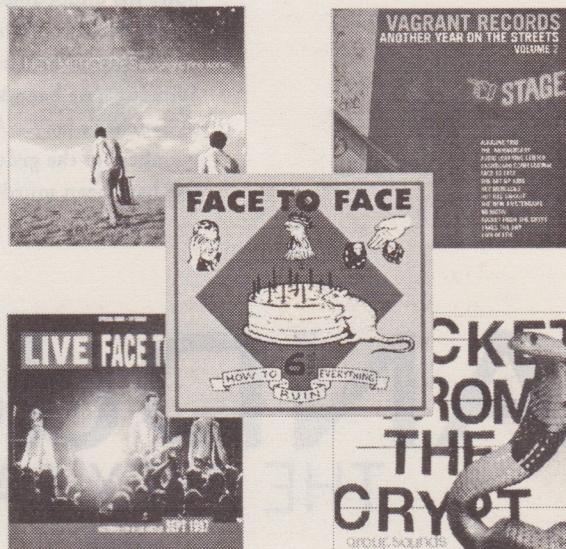
He pauses for a moment and begins looking around his office. Framed photographs of all of his bands adorn the walls. A photo of the Get Up Kids bundled up in the snow is directly in front of him. To his left is a photo of one of his closest friends, Trevor Keith of Face To Face. You have to wonder: Does Egan have all of these photos up as a way to survey his empire or merely as a reminder of all of the friends he's made along the way?

Egan gives the photos one more look before continuing on. "Why wouldn't I support this?" he asks with a smile. "Outside of my family, these bands are my life."

Since the very beginning, that has been Egan's credo—he'll do anything for his bands. Where that credo will leave him, his bands, and the independent community remains to be seen. ◎

**Trevor Kelley** is a California native who has never heard an entire song by Dashboard Confessional—but, funny enough, went out and purchased the last two Blink-182 records. He can be reached at [trevorkelley@yahoo.com](mailto:trevorkelley@yahoo.com).

**Kyle Ryan** is a freelance writer and music geek who lives in Chicago. Last spring, he took his 61-year-old mom to see Rocket From The Crypt. He can be reached at [Info@CMYKyle.com](mailto:Info@CMYKyle.com).



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...elieve a lot can now move after nightfall. "I know nothing," says...  
...beta...now set to two days...and the end of getting off each...  
...midnight show first set of payoffs at each...

**A**lex Sanchez has worked for years to calm the violence between the warring gangs that dominate Los Angeles' Pico-Union/Koreatown area—a role that has won him the respect of gang members as well as some of California's leading politicians. But now he faces a deportation hearing that could not only end his peacemaking—it might also lead to his own violent death.

Sanchez, a 30-year-old citizen of El Salvador, former gang member, and current program director of the Los Angeles and San Salvador-based youth organization Homies Unidos, is facing deportation charges before Immigration Court Judge Peters Collantes in a trial that should climax in June. Neither side disputes his undocumented status. But Sanchez's supporters say deportation would be tantamount to an execution order.

Many current and former gang members deported to El Salvador have been killed in recent years. Since 1999, according to Sanchez's lawyer Allen Diamante and Homies Unidos, five members of the group have been deported to El Salvador—and all five have been murdered under mysterious circumstances.

# lifeANDdeath: THE ALEX SANCHEZ STORY

BY JEFF CHANG

ILLUSTRATION BY SAYRE

In the name of peace and safety, the INS has recently stepped up its efforts to detain and deport alleged criminals and terrorists. But the case of Alex Sanchez raises the question of how deeply the so-called war on terrorism is implicated in America's misguided and failed war on gangs.

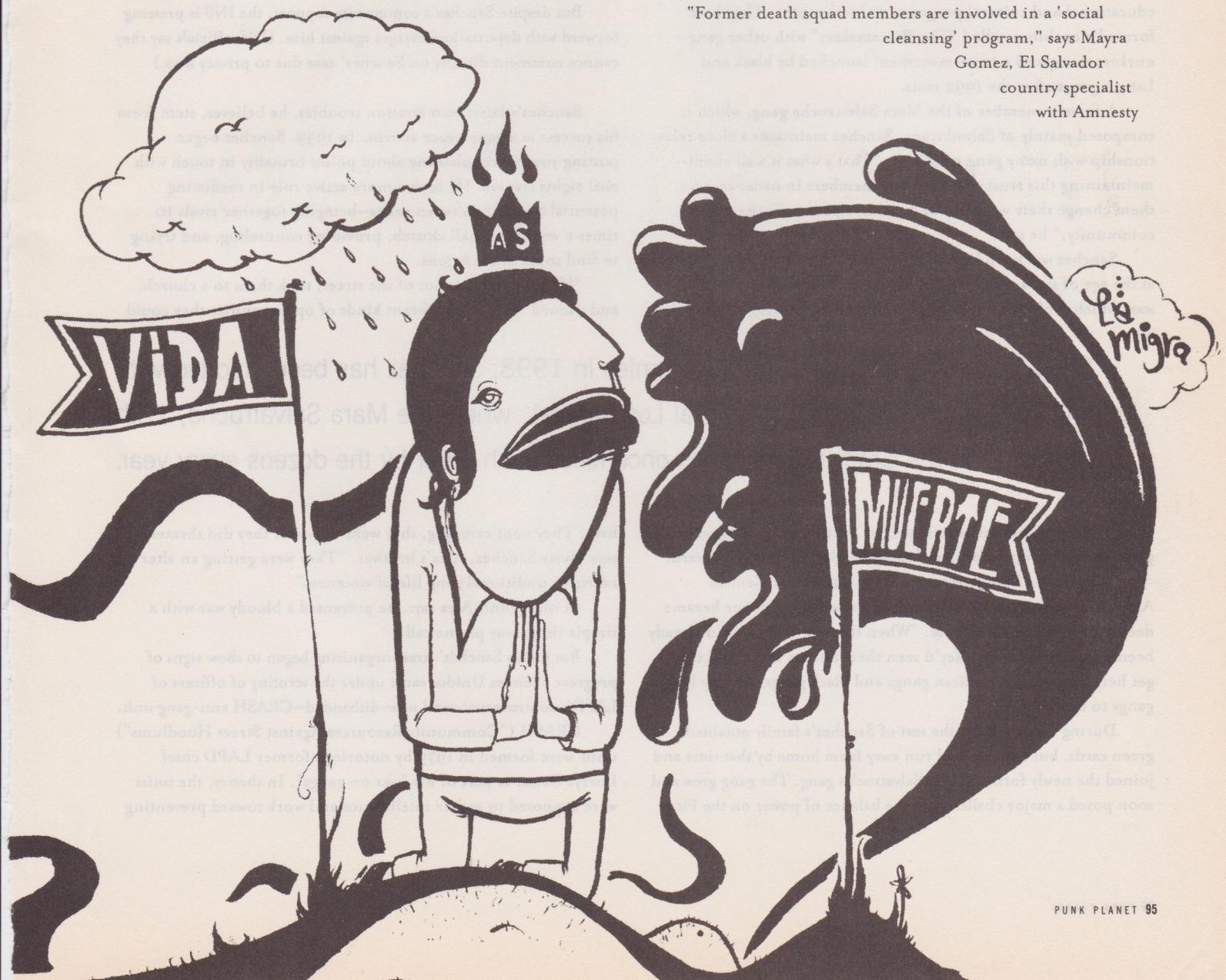
"We are very fearful for his life, knowing what we know about what happens to gang members or former gang members in El Salvador," says Angela Sanbrano, executive director of the Central American Resource Center of Los Angeles.

No one has been convicted of any of the killings of Homies Unidos members, says Sanbrano, but Sanchez and his supporters believe the killings are the work of either street gangs or right-wing vigilantes. Homies Unidos' efforts in Los Angeles and San Salvador, says Sanchez, directly threaten the gangs' transnational growth and strength.

In recent years, thousands of convicted criminals, including many gang members, have been deported from Los Angeles to El Salvador—where they have often simply replicated their gang culture anew. As the Salvadoran gangs compete in a bloody battle for numbers, power, and prestige, Homies Unidos' peace organizing stands in the way, says Sanchez.

The right-wing vigilantes, on the other hand, view all former gang members as a criminal element that needs to be eradicated.

"Former death squad members are involved in a 'social cleansing' program," says Mayra Gomez, El Salvador country specialist with Amnesty



International USA. "They do actively target people such as alleged criminals, prostitutes, street children, and transvestites."

"I fear both sides, because of what I've been speaking against," says Sanchez. "This hearing is a life-or-death decision."

Sanchez has attracted a powerful set of supporters, including civil rights stalwart Reverend James Lawson, actress Joan Cusack, film director Robert Greenwald, former state Assembly Speaker and Los Angeles mayoral candidate Antonio Villaraigosa, and former state senator and famed progressive Tom Hayden.

Reverend Norman S Johnson, Sr, executive director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference of Los Angeles, recently awarded Sanchez the organization's prestigious Drum Major Award. He worries that if Sanchez is deported, "the community would experience a void in leadership from a true survivor committed to peace, justice, and non-violence."

Since becoming an organizer with Homies in 1998, Sanchez has been credited with helping keep a tenuous peace in central Los Angeles, where the Mara Salvatrucha, 18th Street, and the Crazy Riders gangs once killed each other by the dozens every year.

Homies Unidos works with other local groups to provide educational and cultural programs to local youths. They have formed a coalition called "The Peacemakers" with other gang workers to expand a truce movement launched by black and Latino gangs after the 1992 riots.

A former member of the Mara Salvatrucha gang, which is composed mainly of Salvadorans, Sanchez maintains a close relationship with many gang members. "That's what it's all about—maintaining this trust with the gang members in order to have them change their ways and be a positive person in their own community," he says.

Sanchez was born in San Salvador in 1971 and came to the US at the age of six, a refugee of his country's brutal civil war. That war, which exploded to global attention after the Reagan-backed

Union streets previously dominated by the largely Chicano 18th Street Gang. "It was a complete liberation; it was complete independence. I wanted to rebel against everybody," he says.

As a result, he never secured his papers.

Sanchez has been deported once before. In 1994, he was returned to San Salvador after serving time for an auto-theft felony conviction. He slipped back over the border the next year, returning to his Los Angeles neighborhood. There, he met Magdaleno Rose-Avila, the founder of Homies Unidos, who steered him toward peace work. Inspired by Rose-Avila's mentoring and hoping to do better for his newborn son, Sanchez joined Homies as a volunteer, removed many of his old gang tattoos, and began to turn his life around.

Father Greg Boyle, who runs East Los Angeles' gang intervention program, Jobs for a Future, has watched Alex's transformation. "His impact on that community is enormous," says Boyle. "It's not just that he's been there and done that, it's that [gang members] see him as a genuinely caring adult."

But despite Sanchez's community support, the INS is pressing forward with deportation charges against him. (INS officials say they cannot comment directly on Sanchez' case due to privacy laws.)

Sanchez's latest immigration troubles, he believes, stem from his success as a gang peace activist. In 1999, Sanchez began putting youths complaining about police brutality in touch with civil rights lawyers. He took a more active role in mediating potential conflicts between gangs—bringing together rivals 10 times a week at a small church, providing counseling, and trying to find some of them jobs.

"He took the kids out of the street, took them to a church, and showed them the different kinds of opportunities they could

Since becoming an organizer with Homies in 1998, Sanchez has been credited with helping keep a tenuous peace in central Los Angeles, where the Mara Salvatrucha, 18th Street, and the Crazy Riders gangs once killed each other by the dozens every year.

right-wing government assassinated six leftist opposition leaders, grew to tragic proportions, and caused a mass exodus northward.

"They came here as refugees from our war in Central America," explains Tom Hayden, who as a State Senator became deeply involved in Alex's case. "When they got here, they'd already been through violence, they'd seen their fathers shot. And they get here and there's Mexican gangs and black gangs, so they form gangs to claim a space."

During the late '80s, the rest of Sanchez's family obtained green cards, but Sanchez had run away from home by that time and joined the newly formed Mara Salvatrucha gang. The gang grew and soon posed a major challenge to the balance of power on the Pico-

have. They went camping, they went to parks, they did theater," says Oscar Sanchez, Alex's brother. "They were getting an alternative to traditional gang life of violence."

At one point, Alex says, he prevented a bloody war with a simple three-way phone call.

But just as Sanchez' street organizing began to show signs of progress, Homies Unidos came under the scrutiny of officers of LAPD's controversial—and now-disbanded—CRASH anti-gang unit.

CRASH ("Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums") units were formed in 1979 by notorious former LAPD chief Darryl Gates, as part of his "war on gangs". In theory, the units were supposed to gather intelligence and work toward preventing

gang warfare. But during the '80s and the '90s, these special units were implicated in a far-reaching corruption scandal that centered in Homies Unidos' own backyard, the Rampart Division. Rampart's CRASH regularly framed alleged gang members and sold confiscated cocaine. Hundreds of convictions by CRASH officers have either been overturned or are on appeal because of the widespread corruption.

Homies Unidos members say that by 1999, CRASH cops were regularly harassing them. Calling Homies' peace efforts a front for the creation of a "supergang," they increased their surveillance. "They would target everyone who came to the meetings," says Beltran. "At one point they came and asked the church leaders if they could come and spy on the meetings that the group had. The pastor said no. He sent a letter to them, but they didn't stop the harassment."

After Alex became a defense witness for a 14 year-old boy accused of murder, his brother Oscar says the cops really turned up the heat. "At that point, the cops really started targeting him, telling him that they were gonna arrest him, that they were gonna finish Homies Unidos one by one," he says.

At a Tom Hayden-chaired State Senate hearing into police harassment of community organizations at which Sanchez was scheduled to speak, the CRASH cops stormed in, threatening to break up the hearing as they searched the crowd for Sanchez. "The LAPD told [Alex] they were going to give Homies Unidos 'six months to die,'" Beltran says.

Hoping to secure a permanent visa for Sanchez and the other Homies Unidos organizers, so they could continue to organize without fear of being deported, Hayden brought Homies Unidos leaders to meet with INS officials and Salvadoran government officials (including San Salvador's mayor and police chief). "[The INS] gives visas to undocumented people who are informants and spies for the police, so why not a peacemaker?" asks Hayden.

At the meeting, San Salvador's police chief confirmed that Sanchez's life would be in grave danger if he were deported. The INS refused the visa request.

In January 2000, CRASH officers arrested Sanchez and turned him over to the INS, in blatant disregard of Special Order 40—a Los Angeles executive order that forbids police intervention in immigration cases. Sanchez says that the police had no charges; he was arrested simply to be turned over to the INS. "I still have the pink slip [given to him at the police station] that says, 'Deportation proceedings,'" Sanchez says.

Meanwhile, the US Attorney's Office in Los Angeles moved to have Sanchez deported for illegally re-entering the country.

Sanchez's case quickly became a cause celebre. At the 2000 Democratic Convention, a thousand demonstrators chanted "Free Alex Sanchez!" during a day-long protest at the Rampart Division. The same day, Sanchez, who has spent much of his life in prison or juvenile detention, says he organized a hunger strike to protest

living conditions at the INS Detention Facility at Terminal Island. "There was no air conditioning, hardly any ventilation. They only had this little fan. And then the walls were peeling off, the restrooms—which were supposed to be cleaned every two or three days—and the showers had green stuff on them," he recalls.

He was released in late September after a federal judge reduced his felony conviction to a misdemeanor. Under pressure from Hayden's office, the US Attorney dropped its illegal re-entry case. The INS continues to press its bid for deportation.

Mario Cuellar, a 26-year-old Salvadoran organizer and friend of Sanchez's, is a Pico-Union resident and a long-time cop watcher. He says, "They don't wanna see people organizing. They benefit from gangs. We have a Mafia kind of government over here."

In 2000, after an almost decade-long decline, violent crimes in inner Los Angeles spiked upward. Murders alone increased by 25 percent from 1999. Some authorities argue that it was the inevitable result of the demobilization of the CRASH anti-gang units.

But many organizers believe the rise is the long-term result of a shift towards repressive anti-gang injunctions and the whip-saw vigilanteism of the CRASH units, which combined to thwart the efforts of the best organizers. And amidst the new war on terrorism, in which thousands are detained with no recourse to human rights and anti-immigrant sentiment is justified by the mantra of "fighting terrorism", the national push towards a police state continues.

It's exactly this kind of climate that crushes community-based solutions. The problem, organizers explain, is not that the CRASH units have been taken off the streets—it's that the *organizers* have been taken off the streets.

"It has become very very difficult to organize because our organizers have been targeted by the LAPD," explains Beltran. "They intimidate them. A good number are undocumented, some of them are on probation. They can't associate. If they see two of us together from a gang, and if you're on probation, that gives you a year back in prison. They're doing everything to make it more difficult for youth to organize."

Alex Sanchez emphasizes that gang peace work—not CRASH policing—led to the steep drops in crime. "In 1993, most of the gangs—Latino gangs and African American gangs—managed to create this truce. It lasted for so many years. The peace continued until early this decade," he explains.

As Sanchez awaits the final hearing before the Immigration Court, he worries that during the Bush recession, gang violence will rise again. "You can only hold a truce for so long. But then what do you do after that," he asks. "That's when you have to bring in resources into the community, into the youth."

If Sanchez is deported, his supporters say, there will be one less person to help maintain that tenuous peace—and he himself might not survive long enough to witness the outcome. ☺

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*Portions of this article previously appeared at 360hiphop.com (RIP!) and MotherJones.com. Thanks to Vince Beiser and Chris Fan.*

**M**y name is John Clarke and I am an Organizer with the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP). In the early afternoon of February 19th, 2002, I crossed the international bridge between Sarnia, Ontario and Port Huron, Michigan. I was on my way to a speaking engagement that had been set up by students at Michigan State University.

When I pulled my car up to the customs booth, the officer asked where I was bound and I told him. He wanted to know on what basis I was asked to speak and whether I would be paid. I replied that I was with OCAP and that I had been told by the organizers of the meeting that an honourarium would be provided, as was normal. The officer was concerned that this meant I was coming into the US to work. Of course, people on both sides of the border accept speaking invitations all the time on this basis and the issue of a work permit is never raised. At this point, the matter was nothing that could not have been rapidly cleared up if I had been on my way to address a business seminar or deliver a lecture on self awareness.

As instructed by the officer, I parked my car and made my way into the offices shared by customs and US Immigration. As soon as my ID was run through the computer, there was a marked change in the situation. An officer asked me more questions about my intentions in the US, what anti-globalization protests I had attended and whether I opposed the "ideology of the United States." My car was searched and I was taken into a room and thoroughly (though not roughly) frisked. I was then told that I would be denied entry to the US and that the FBI and State Department wanted to speak to me. Agents were on their way from Detroit.

After about an hour and a half, a man entered the "controlled" reception area that I was being kept in and passed by me into the inner offices. He was carrying a big folder and a pile of files—it struck me that he carried them the way a highly skilled worker might carry his or her precision tools. He spent some time in discussion with the local officers and then I was brought into an interrogation room to deal with him. He introduced himself and gave me his card. His name was Edward J Seitz of the State Department of the United States Diplomatic Security Service and his rank was Special Agent. I found him to be an impressive and fascinating character.

Seitz, with the backing of another local officer, interrogated

me for some considerable time. It was not a situation like an arrest by Canadian police where silence is the best option. Had I refused to talk to him, I did not doubt that he would order me detained and that it would be some time before the Canadian consular authorities came into the picture. If I was to avoid at least several days in detention, I determined that I had no option but to answer his questions. Immediately, it was obvious to me that I was dealing with a specialist in interrogation methods. He told the admiring locals at one point that he had been stationed in Yemen. I avoided speculating on how he had employed his talents there.

Seitz's basic strategy, apart from general intelligence gathering, was to try and set me up to tell him something false that would place me in the situation of violating US law. He began with some very basic questions on my personal background, extremely affable in his manner and striking a pose of mild confusion that was designed to make me underestimate him. He then asked about OCAP. He told me it sounded like we were good people but he had heard something about an organization that a year or so before had been involved in a confrontation with the police at the Ontario Legislature. "That wasn't the OCAP was it?"

The trap was clear and I told him that indeed we were that organization. His affable manner then vanished and his difficulties in focusing his thoughts ended.

He gradually moved his chair over so we were right up against each other and fired questions at me. He wanted to know about the June 15, 2000 March on the Ontario Legislature where the Toronto police attacked a march against homelessness that we had organized. He wanted to know about charges that the police have against me. He wanted to know how OCAP is structured and who are the members of its elected executive committee (which I refused to tell him). Seitz then took up the question of OCAP's friends and allies in the US. Are we involved in anti globalization work? Isn't this a cover for anarchism? Was I personally an anarchist or a socialist?

Seitz had a huge file on OCAP with him that included leaflets from public speaking events I had been at in the US. He knew the name of the man I stayed with the last time I was in Chicago. He wanted to know who I spoke to in the Chicago Direct Action Network (DAN). He claimed that I was an advocate of violence and that my association with DAN showed this but, in a rare stumble, could find nothing in their literature that proved

A recent incident at the US/Canadian border indicates that the definition of "terrorist" is growing increasingly fuzzy and that in the name of "national security" dissenting voices are being kept out of the country. This is one man's tale of trying to get into the USA.



that they call for violence.

This phase of the questioning went on for a long time. He covered a great deal of ground and had at his disposal voluminous information on myself and the OCAP. He, obviously, had been in contact with the Canadian police but was most interested on our US allies.

The exception was an enormous interest in Canadian anti-capitalist activist, Jaggi Singh. He knew that he and I had spoken at the same meetings and was most anxious to find out if he was also in the US. He showed me a picture of Jaggi and wanted to know where he was at that moment. Suddenly, the mask of affability went back on. I was a "gentleman" and he didn't want to lock me up. I was OK; but he couldn't understand how I worked with a "violent man like Mr. Singh." (Here, he was reiterating a preposterous and malicious myth that Canadian police authorities have spread about Jaggi).

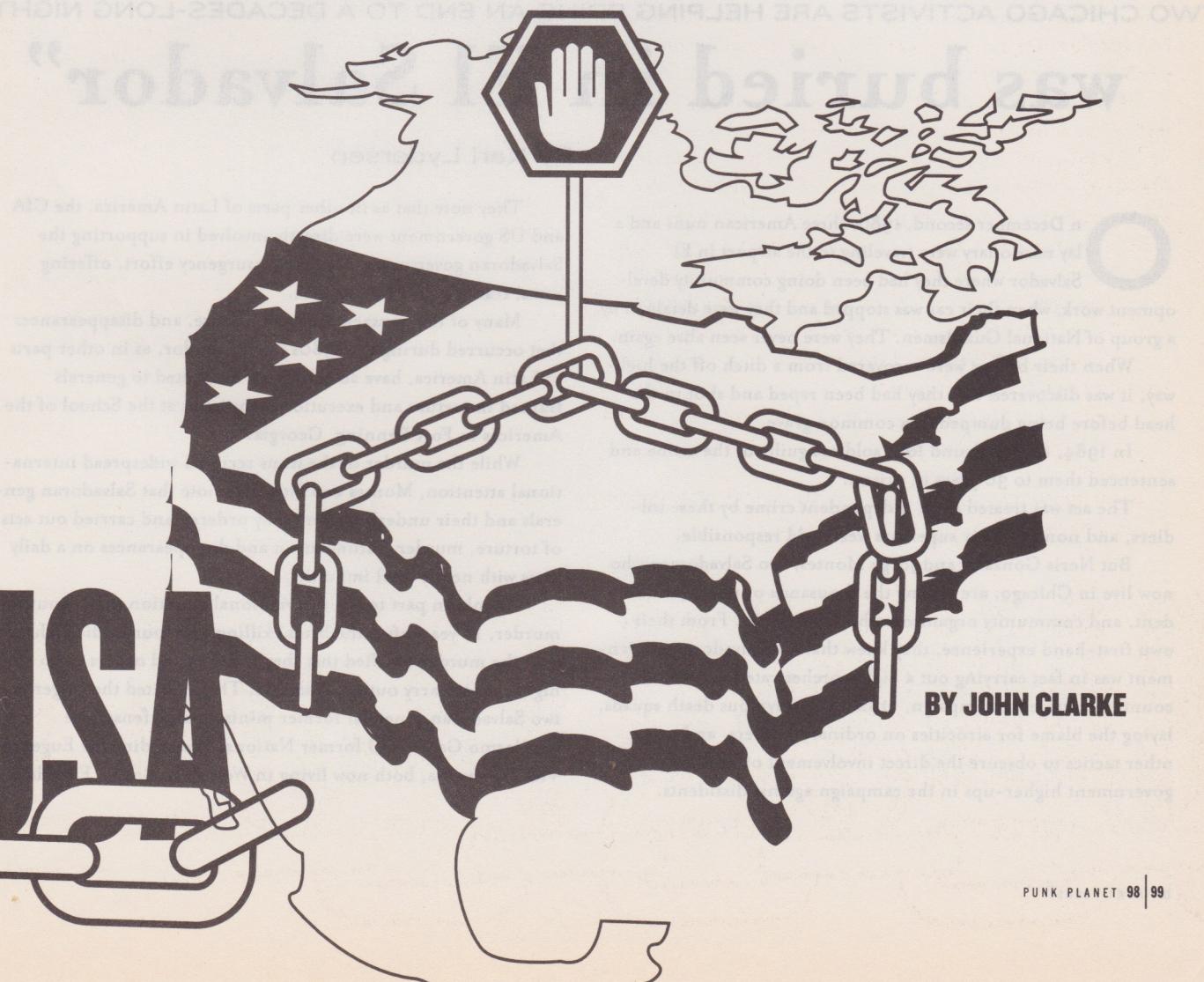
Then Seitz told me he would have to ban me from the US, but I could go to the US Consulate in Toronto and apply for a waiver. I could take a seat in the waiting room while they prepared some paperwork, but I would soon be on my way.

I had not been sitting out there long, however, before the Special Agent came out to try a new tack that I had heard of in the past. Essentially, his plan was to make me think he was utterly mad and, thereby, rattle me to the point where I lost my judgement. I assume the method works better if it is used after serious sleep

deprivation. He came over and sat next to me right there in the waiting area with other people around. He had a few OCAP checks that he asserted showed I was bringing with me the means to live illegally in the US. I was going to jail, he asserted. I explained that the checks were in my bag because I always kept a few with me to cover the cost of office supplies and such and that I had seen no reason to take them out just because I was going to spend a few hours in Michigan.

Then came the most astounding part of the whole interrogation. Out of the blue, Seitz demanded to know where Osama Bin Laden was hiding. I knew where he was, he insisted. If I grew a beard, I would look like Bin Laden, he said. He insisted that I was holding back on telling him why I was going to the University and who I was going to meet there. If I didn't want to go to jail, it was time to tell him the real story. I replied that I had been quite open with him about my intentions and that sending me to jail was now up to him. He laughed, told me there were no problems. I could go home after all. Did I drink tea or coffee? Would I have a coffee with him if he came up to Toronto? I told him I would, which was the only lie I told that day. He gathered up his files and left.

Shortly after this, the local officials gave me the free ticket for the bridge which is the only perk that comes along with being denied entry to the US and, a little over five hours after coming over, I headed back to the Canadian side. ◎





# "I felt like part of my body was buried in El Salvador"

TWO CHICAGO ACTIVISTS ARE HELPING BRING AN END TO A DECADES-LONG NIGHTMARE

By Kari Lydersen

**O**n December second, 1980, three American nuns and a lay missionary were traveling to the airport in El Salvador where they had been doing community development work, when their car was stopped and they were detained by a group of National Guardsmen. They were never seen alive again.

When their bodies were recovered from a ditch off the highway, it was discovered that they had been raped and shot in the head before being dumped in a common grave.

In 1984, a court found four soldiers guilty of the crime and sentenced them to 30 years in prison.

The act was treated as an independent crime by these soldiers, and none of their superiors were held responsible.

But Neris Gonzalez and Jorge Montes, two Salvadorans who now live in Chicago, are among the thousands of religious, student, and community organizers who knew better. From their own first-hand experience, they knew that the Salvadoran government was in fact carrying out a highly orchestrated and brutal counter-insurgency campaign, utilizing anonymous death squads, laying the blame for atrocities on ordinary soldiers, and using other tactics to obscure the direct involvement of military and government higher-ups in the campaign against dissidents.

They note that as in other parts of Latin America, the CIA and US government were directly involved in supporting the Salvadoran government's counterinsurgency effort, offering arms, training and intelligence.

Many of the massacres, acts of torture, and disappearances that occurred during the 1980s in El Salvador, as in other parts of Latin America, have actually been attributed to generals trained in torture and execution techniques at the School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia.

While the murder of the nuns received widespread international attention, Montes and Gonzalez note that Salvadoran generals and their underlings generally ordered and carried out acts of torture, murder, intimidation and disappearances on a daily basis with nearly total impunity.

Thanks in part to the international attention on the nun's murder, 18 years after the brutal killing, the four soldiers charged with the murder testified that they had received orders from higher up to carry out the massacre. They pointed the finger at two Salvadoran generals: former minister of defense Jose Guillermo Garcia and former National Guard director Eugenio Vides Casanova, both now living in West Palm Beach, Florida.



In 1999, Gonzalez and two other Salvadoran torture survivors filed a civil suit in US district court in Florida against the generals, demanding damages for torture and human rights violations. Gonzalez was joined in the case by Juan Romagoza Arce, a doctor who in 1980 was abducted, detained and tortured with electric shocks, beatings and needles for three and a half weeks because of his work at a church clinic; and by Carlos Mauricio, a professor at the University of El Salvador who in 1983 was abducted and tortured for one and a half weeks at National Police headquarters. The trial was slated to begin in January of this year, but has been delayed.

(Also in 1999, family members of the murdered nuns filed a civil suit against the two Salvadoran generals. In 2000 a jury found for the defendants, but that case has been appealed.)

"The government used repression and impunity as a way to silence dissension and maintain the system of power for a few rich families," says Montes, who is supporting the case through his work along with Gonzalez on the End the Impunity Project based in Chicago. "That impunity has to end."

Their desire to see generals like Garcia and Casanova, as well as their higher-ups put on trial for the crimes they have craftily avoided for two decades drives Montes and Gonzalez's work. But their passion and their sense of urgency comes from their own brutal experiences in El Salvador.

Montes and Gonzalez both were persecuted by the Salvadoran government for their roles in community organizing and education programs through the Catholic Church. Even as a high school student, Montes says, he was aware of the injustice and oppression that existed for peasants and workers in El Salvador. He was inspired by the efforts of his godfather, who worked for various community and health organizations despite threats from paramilitary groups aligned with the government.

In 1979, as Montes's application for political asylum in the US notes, his godfather woke to find a white hand drawn on his door, the mark of the White Warrior Union (Union Guerrera Blanca) paramilitary group. The hand was a sign he had to either leave the area or be killed; he left.

In high school, Montes joined a youth group working for education and justice for campesinos. He said he was constantly harassed by representatives of ORDEN (a sort of civil wing of the military), to become an informant.

"We worked with the church, with Christian-based communities," he says. "Our members were teachers, university students, union members. We were trying to organize the community for dignity, respect, more social services, education. We had a social awareness that people shouldn't be killed for demanding respect. That campesinos needed land, and they shouldn't be killed for demanding land. That was their right."

In June of 1981, when he was 19, Montes was walking with members of the youth group outside the region of Tanacateque, when he heard a voice yell (in Spanish) "If you take another step we have orders to kill you."

He says he and the others were captured by eight soldiers, and taken to a vacant distillery where they were beaten and interrogated.

"We were given food with drugs in them, so I don't remember a lot of what happened," Montes recollects.

He notes that his captors—who wore civilian clothes—used M-16s and other weapons typical of the military.

"They accused us of being guerrillas with the BPR (Bloque Popular Revolucionario)," he says. "I was knocked off my chair and beaten with a rifle butt during the interrogations."

Before they were released, the kidnappers forced the youth to have their pictures taken in front of a flag and agree to a story, reported in local papers, that they had been kidnapped by guerrillas and liberated by the army.

"We had to say that to be released, or we would be killed," he said. "In 1981 they just killed people whenever they wanted to. No one would have known."

In 1984, Montes joined a Dominican order and worked teaching and providing food and medical supplies to the poor in the province of Soyapango as well as working in Costa Rica.

"The military was constantly making people I worked with disappear," he says. "They believed bringing food and medical supplies to people in areas of conflict labeled us as FMLN (the main guerrilla group at the time) collaborators."

"The government used repression and impunity as a way to silence dissension and maintain the system of power for a few rich families," says Montes...

## "That impunity has to end."

In 1988 members of a death squad surrounded Montes's home in Soyapango.

"They were armed and yelling to open the door," he remembers. "They stayed outside all night. They said they were from a death squad. I stayed hidden until 6 pm the next day. After that I stayed for a while but many Salvadorans and foreigners were captured."

In 1989, Montes left Soyapango and began working for a variety of organizations, traveling around the country. He worked on promoting native arts and crafts, HIV prevention and medical care. He says his offices were searched numerous times and he received threats by phone. In 1996, he came to the US and gained political asylum.

Gonzalez, who now does ecological and community organizing work in Chicago, also came to the US as a survivor of torture in El Salvador.

"I am a torture survivor," she says in Spanish. "Ever since I was young, I was very committed to the community. I really enjoyed working with education and health programs. I never imagined that teaching people to read and write would lead to what it did."

She notes that in her community, there was only a 60 percent literacy rate. Having finished ninth grade, she was considered highly educated.

"I got involved with some doctors and we started a health, education, and literacy program," she explains. "Without even realizing it, I became one of the leaders. We taught peasants to count because when peasants would bring their sacks of over 100 pounds of sugar cane or cotton or coffee to the land owners, the land owners would say there was only 50 pounds. Witnessing this injustice made me want to do something about it, even as a young child. I got together with priests and workers—anyone who wanted to organize themselves."

She says that within a month, they had taught peasants to count to 100.

"When the peasants would tell the landowners they had over 100 pounds, the land owners would say 'You are an illiterate peasant, How can you tell me that?'" she says.

For giving workers this simple education, Gonzalez and her co-workers were considered dangerous revolutionaries.

"They tried to label us as guerrillas. There were guerrillas, but we were just members of the community," she says.

She was captured by the National Guard while at a market in San Vicente on the day after Christmas in 1979. She was eight months pregnant at the time. She was held and interrogated for 15 days, and tortured and raped numerous times. Because of the torture, her baby was born with broken bones and multiple injuries, and died at two months of age.

"I was in the hands of the death squads," she says. "I lost my baby to the results of torture."

Like Montes, Gonzalez had little memory of her torture or the following weeks.

"After a year or so I recovered and regained my full memory thanks to the help from my community," she says. "Thankfully to the secret clinics that helped me regain my memory after a year, I was able to make contacts with people outside of El Salvador. They offered to help me leave, but I couldn't. I felt like part of my body was buried in El Salvador. After that I became even more involved in the community."

Gonzalez continued to do educational, ecological and other community work around the country.

"The struggle became my life and I started realizing what impunity was," she says. "Before I didn't know what impunity meant, only terror. They would turn things around and label us terrorists. Imagine that—labeling us terrorists for teaching people to count."

Montes notes that along with suing the generals responsible for the nuns' murder, the End the Impunity Project is seeking an end to government impunity on local issues in the US, such as police brutality, as well as ongoing trouble in Latin America.

"There is still impunity in my country," he explains. "It's not ending. It's more sophisticated, so you can't see it as clearly, but there are constant human rights violations and there is no recourse in the corrupt justice system. That is their way of maintaining power, because people are afraid to speak up. The trial and things like that will give people the courage to speak." ©



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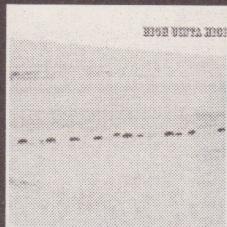
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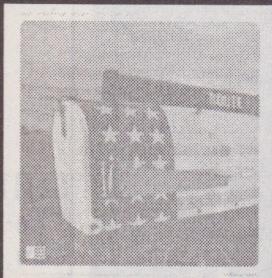


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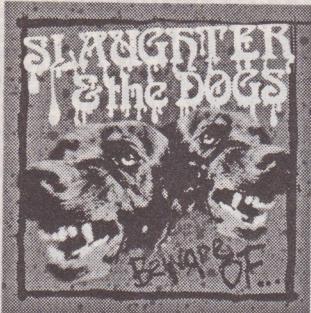
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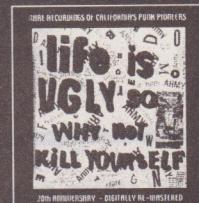
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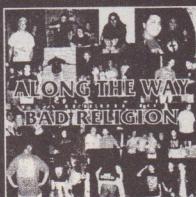
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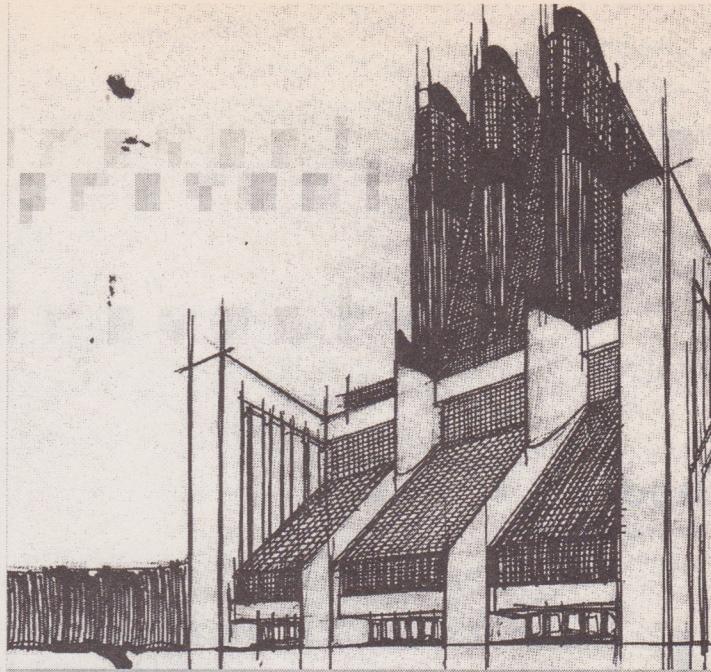


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## Ibid

by Evan Johnston

Ibid was the name of the cat who lived next door, and the cat who came before her. Both were electrocuted while chewing the wire cords of the family television. Both were small, perfectly white cats who died when they were two years old.

I was seven when the first cat died, nine when the second passed on. I remembered seeing these little white cats from my window, they would go into our yard looking for birds and moles. I didn't think much of the first cat, but when Ibid the second came around, I recalled liking her more. The new cat was going to be smarter. The new cat would be better off than the old cat because her family had learned from their mistakes. They would put something in front of the TV cord, or maybe they would cover the cord in duct tape, or something, anything, to try to save Ibid the second from her predecessor's fatal error.

But then there were two dead white Ibids. They were buried next to each other, one after the other, 1. Ibid, 2. Ibid.

I told my friends about the Ibid deaths, and Bess said that there was no way a cat could die from electrocution, "It's scientifically impossible," she said. This was what I had thought, because I was certain that there was no way two cats could

die from electrocution, let alone one.

So I did research. I went to libraries, I talked to pet owners, I asked my father questions, and I learned that, in fact, it was possible for a cat to die from electrocution, and that pets could die even if they did have the same name. The whole scenario was quite possible, though very unusual.

I also learned that there was a spray available at pet stores that would keep cats away from electrical wires. After asking money from my father, I purchased this spray, wrapped it and made a card, then I went next door and rang the doorbell. A man and a woman answered the door.

"Hello," I said, "My name is Nancy and I am your neighbor next door. This is a spray you can use to keep your next cat from eating the television cord and dying."

I had practiced this statement eleven times in a mirror prior to this visit. The words came out a little more nervous than I had planned, but it sounded acceptable. There were several versions of this statement prepared:

1. "My name is Nancy and I am nine years old. This is a spray you use to keep your cat from dying."
2. "My name is Nancy and I am nine years old. This is a spray you use to keep your cat from dying."

3. "My name is Nancy, and this spray will protect your cat."

4. "Hello. Please do not let your cat die again."

5. "I notice your cat keeps dying."

6. "Hi! Here's this!"

7. "Had you taken better care of your cat, I would not be here today."

The man and the woman looked at each other, they both smiled and then they handed the spray back to me. "Thank you very much, but this won't be necessary. Please . . . keep it, for your cat, maybe."

I told them that I did not have a cat. And as I told them this, a small white kitten emerged from the hallway. A small, perfectly white kitten. When I opened my mouth to explain why they needed the spray, they said they had to go, and that they could not talk anymore.

1. Ibid. 2. Ibid. 3. Ibid.

I did not understand what was going on then. I am not sure that I understand now, either. For all my intervention and investigation, all I have established is that Ibid is a cat who will die; Ibid is the cat who dies. ☺

---

Evan Johnston lives in Brooklyn, New York. He is a book designer and an occasional zine publisher, with no natural predators in the wild.

---

**CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS:** Keep those submission coming. Remember to put your name, contact info, and word count on the story itself. Attachments should be a word, plain text or RTF file. If you don't have a story to submit, write to me and tell me about something you've read recently. Or just tell me what you think of the fiction. I really like hearing from people who read the fiction section! Send your stuff to me at [fiction@punkplanet.com](mailto:fiction@punkplanet.com). —Leah Ryan

## Ruining

by Jim Valosik

**T**he night I tried to drown myself was also the night I put my head in the oven. By then they had all fallen asleep. They tried to pull me out but didn't realize that I'd tied my hair to the rack. I was very quiet. By then there wasn't much point pulling me out. Even when you turn it off, five hundred degrees takes a while to cool down. All of my thoughts had disappeared white long before then.

Before, when the family was awake, I wasn't as calm. I was beautiful and they ruined it. That was before my son brilliantly began banging his head on the wall. That was before my husband sat blubbering at the kitchen table and before my daughter yanked my wet hair with one hand and my sharpest knife from me with the other. It's the knife I used to cut my wedding cake and it's long.

He called her at school, my husband. I heard him when I was in the attic. He thought that I was going to hang myself but I was really just listening. I heard him say that I had become unpredictable and that he needed her. I convinced him that I was fine but that I wanted some time by myself. When they left me alone, I crept down the steps and stole into the bathroom in my bedroom.

I was so quiet. I moved into the gue-stroom weeks ago. After I swallowed the remainder of my medication, I looked down the hall and saw my husband lying down in his bedroom. He was very sensitive, if that's the word for it. I headed quietly for the cellar, pausing in the kitchen to grab the scotch.

While the giant plastic sink filled, I paced slowly in tight circles and drank straight from the bottle. The second that it was full enough I walked straight over to the sink and shoved my head down as deep as it would go. I didn't know what to do, so I held my breath. I figured that I would pass out and then my body would naturally breathe. I opened my eyes and it felt like every blood vessel in them popped at once. Years of paint thinners and insecticides penetrated them with uncountable invisible needles. I passed out to the sound of my daughter's jeep roaring up the driveway and woke up to her screaming to me on the cellar floor.

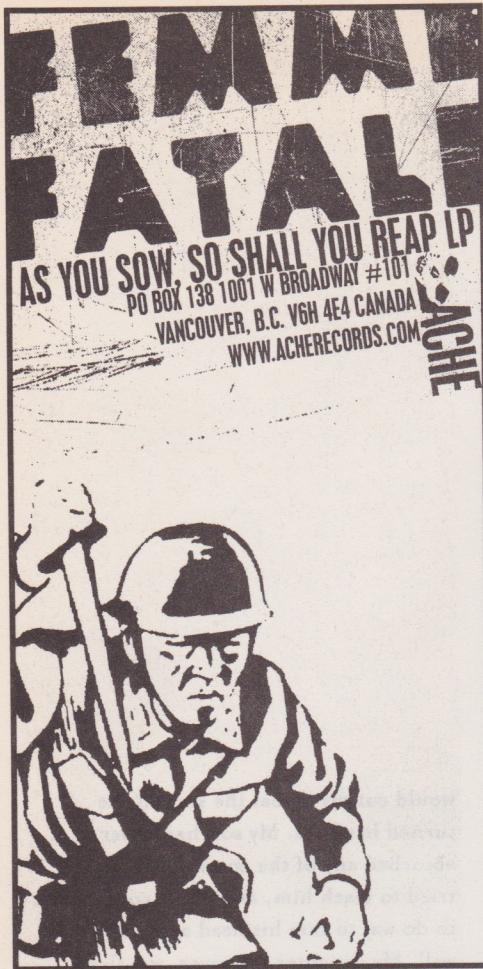
After I stopped coughing, she dragged me up into the kitchen and I tried to pull her down the stairs. She was smart and hung onto the handrail. While my husband vacantly called poison control I grabbed the long knife out of the dishwasher and told my daughter that I

would cut my throat the second she turned her back. My son had never absorbed any of the common sense I tried to teach him, and all he could think to do was to ram his head against the wall. My daughter, however, was fiery. She grabbed my chemical-soaked hair and stole my knife.

I knew then that I should probably play it safe and pretend that I had calmed down. I even cried and hugged them all, but I was really just waiting. Once they were all sound asleep I crept into the kitchen and turned on the oven. At first the heat was unbearable, but that didn't last long. I decided that I was just going to lay there and try not to move. I made it a game. I wanted the wings to stop flapping and the babies to stop crying and all the people to stop screaming my name. I thought to myself "I bet I can do this without making a sound," right before everything disappeared into white. ☺

---

Jim Valosik lives in Murfreesboro, TN, plays drums in the band Serotonin, and does occasional freelance graphic design. Completing a degree in English Literature and Writing, *Ruining* is his first piece of fiction, but Jim is now working on a novel concerning the elderly, called "This is Not a House of Life", and a separate collection of short stories. E-mail for information: [jival@hotmail.com](mailto:jival@hotmail.com)



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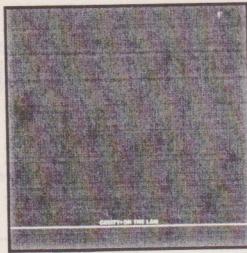
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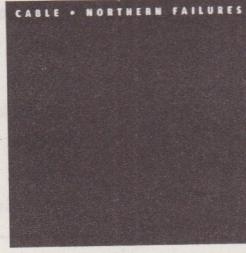
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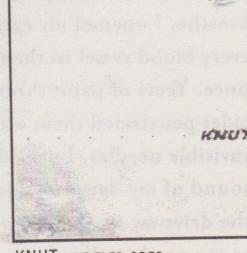
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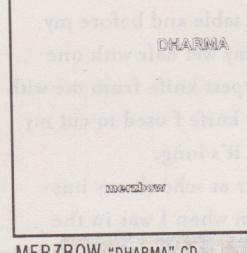
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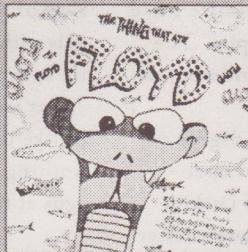
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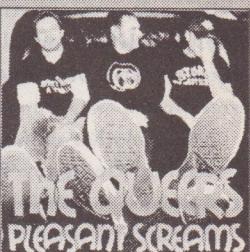
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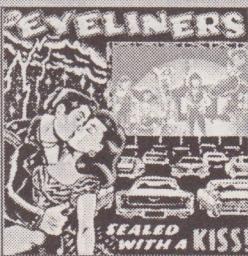
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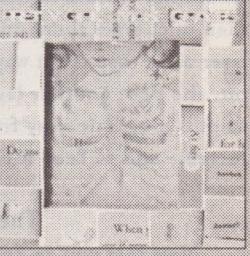
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## the DIY files

# Seven Ways to Survive a Punk Show:

By Mandy Wright

**L**et's face it: being a girl in a traditionally male-dominated society is a tough job. In most instances, girls have to work twice as hard as guys just to be treated as equals. The punk-rock subculture is no exception to this rule. Punk is all about being defiant and tough, which are typically male characteristics. There is no place where this is better illustrated than at a punk show. Being a girl at a punk show is like being tossed into a stampede of spooked cattle—if you don't know how to hold your own, you're bound to be trampled. Here are some tips to help you hone your survival instincts.

### Dress for the occasion

The first thing you have to know going into a punk show is that you're probably in for a long night. So, whatever you wear should be something that you'll be comfortable in for more than five minutes. Also, you are bound to get dirty. By the end of the night, you'll be covered in not only your own sweat and blood, but the bodily fluids of others too. Casey Lewis, 20, has had her share of sanguineous experiences. "When I lived in Riverside, I used to go to this place called the Barn. It was really small, and sometimes when I'd come out I'd realize I had other people's blood all over me from being in the pit." The moral of this story? Wear something that can be laundered, or even thrown away if need be.

Your clothes should also provide you with some degree of protection. Going to a show in shorts, a tank top and open-toed shoes is just asking for trouble. A sturdy pair of Dickies work pants and some steel-toed Doc Martens are a much better way to ensure that you come away from your concert-going experience intact. Some girls will even resort to more extreme measures. Heather Skow, 20, a student at Cal State Long Beach, regularly attends shows with a girl who goes so far as to secure her clothes to herself. "She puts on a layer of clothes, then duct tapes them on," said Skow, "then she puts on another layer after that. That way, if her clothes get ripped off in the pit, she's got another layer on underneath." Also, don't forget to pull long hair away from your face to keep you more comfortable and to keep it from being pulled or caught.

### The more, the merrier

Now that you're decked out in your Dickies and Docs, you have another decision ahead of you: who are going to be your partners-in-crime? The best idea is to take as big of a group as

you can manage. Taking a few members of the male species with you is always a good idea, since they know how to handle their own kind. If all you can rally are girlfriends, make sure they know these tips as well, and be sure to stick together. Another perk to traveling in packs: being surrounded by your own friends means there's less chance of getting shoved around, knocked over, or becoming the victim of any other random acts of rudeness.

### Get to know your neighbors

This is probably one of the most important things to do when going to a punk show. Whether or not you've managed to pull together a big group of friends, you'll be surrounded by people you don't know. You might think to yourself, "What's the point of trying to make friends with people I'll never see again?" The point is, these people will either be your allies or your enemies for the rest of the show. If you can establish some type of friendly vibe with the people around you, they'll be more willing to help you out later than if you've exchanged some not-so-friendly words. If you fall, if you can't see the band, or if you want to crowd surf, you'll need the cooperation of the show-goers around you. Lewis finds that making pals with the big fellows can work out for the best. "I always get in-between big guys for protection at shows," said Lewis. "That way nothing can get through, and I think the guys kind of like the fact that they're protecting a small girl." There's nothing better than gaining a human shield and boosting some egos at the same time.

### Think BIG

Being a girl, you have to realize that your presence is just not as domineering as some of your fellow punks. That said, there are things you can do to make yourself appear bigger. Think of a peacock. When a peacock feels threatened, it fans out its huge tail in an attempt to look larger. When you're at a show, be a peacock. Stand tall, position your legs wider than you normally would, and cross your arms or put them on your hips. By doing this, not only will you appear bigger, but you will also give yourself some personal space. People can't close in right on top of you if you stand this way, so you get some room to breathe. This strategy will also help squelch the claustrophobic feeling that naturally comes when you're crammed into a tiny venue with a thousand other rabid punk fans. Ben VanderBeek, of the band Strategies for

# A Woman's Perspective

Hangman, agrees that girls should try to toughen up their appearance, "If a girl has brawn, stench, or piercings, no one's going to mess with her."

## Stand your ground

This one goes hand-in-hand with number four. Behind that puffed-up exterior, you need to have some guts to back it up. Sometimes just asking someone to stop what they're doing can be surprisingly effective. Most people are just at a show to enjoy the music, and they won't bite your head off if what they're doing is hurting or bothering you. If someone is getting out of control and you're really being shoved around, shoving back will usually solve the problem. Once the people around you realize that you aren't afraid to stick up for yourself, you may even earn their respect. Leslie Lewis, 20, is not afraid to stand her ground. "If you're a girl who's holding your own in the pit, guys tend to respect you and be friendly towards you."

## Pick your battles

Sometimes, no matter what you do, you will encounter people who have no regard for anyone but themselves. In this situation, you have to make a decision. You can choose to ignore them, you can find another spot in the crowd, or you can let them know exactly how you feel. If you choose option number three, you have to assess the situation. If the perpetrator is a girl like you, telling her what you think of her behavior will probably not result in violence. If it does, at least you're on the same level. On the other hand, if the source of your irritation is a large male, or someone who appears to be enhancing his enjoyment of the show with some type of substance, you may want to rethink your decision. You want to be able to enjoy the show, but you don't want to get involved in an argument or fight that you're going to lose.

## Do unto others . . .

Finally, remember that you have a strong bond with the people at the show. You all share a love of both punk music and the rush that comes with seeing a band play live. So, remember that the golden rule applies even at a punk show: Treat people the way you would want to be treated. Don't get so caught up trying to act tough or defend yourself that you forget to enjoy the music and respect the people around you. Ultimately, you are all united by a love for the band and a respect for its music. ☺

# early to bed

by Sex Lady Searah



Dear Sex Lady,

Can you give me some tips on giving better head to girls? And please don't tell me to talk to my girl-friend about it, she is too shy to tell me what she wants, I've tried!

Signed,

Wanna-Be Pussy Eater

Pussy Eater,

I am glad to hear you asked your girl what she liked and it's too bad she can't help you. I am a big proponent of the theory that there is no right way to give head (or perform any kind of sex act) and that communication with your partner is the best way to make sure that what you are doing is driving them wild. I think it's incredibly important to be able to communicate to your lover what you like and how you like it. That being said, there are some tips that help make you a better muff diver and as a dyke, I have been on both ends of the tongue enough times to have a pretty good handle on what makes a good lickjob. So here they are:

## The Sex Lady's Guide to Muff Diving or How to Eat Pussy Real Good

1. You gotta love eating pussy, or at least fake it the best you can.

There is nothing worse than an obviously uninterested lover. If you don't absolutely *love* eating her out (and I can't imagine what you wouldn't!) you have to at least *pretend* that you do. And if you do love it, show it! There is nothing sexier than thinking that the person whose face is between your legs wants to be nowhere else in the world. Let your lover know how much you love her pussy, praise the beauty of it (although try to avoid using cheesy words like "love-flower") and tell her how much you want to taste her cunt. Try to convince her she is doing you a favor by letting you eat her out. While you're down there, make

noises letting her know you love it. "Mmmm, slurp, yumm. You taste soooo good, baby"

Now I am sure there are guys out there who don't like to or even refuse to eat pussy (you gay boys are, of course, excused, please talk amongst yourselves). We all have the right to do or not do what we want, but remember this: if you want her to suck your dick, you better sure as hell be willing to munch her rug. Nothing spells asshole faster than a guy who takes, but doesn't reciprocate.

So you are not all that into pussy eating, but you are good person so you are going to do it for her. If you aren't used to the taste, maybe you should grab some flavored lube and ease your way into her scent. Or try one of the other flavored body products out there. Personally, as my good friend once said, "I don't want a pussy flavored ice cream so why would I want ice cream flavored pussy," but for some people, they need a little incentive to stick their tongue in unfamiliar territory. Just don't tell her that's why you're using the flavored stuff.

### 2. Use a variety of strokes

So you're down there and you are ready to dive in. It's tempting to just head right for the clit and start licking, but most girls are gonna want a little lead up to that. Take your time. Start out slow. Take a few minutes to lick the whole area. Try using your whole tongue and then try just the very tip. Explore her labia folds and dart into her vagina. Make little circles as well as long slow up and down strokes. Try sucking very lightly on her clit—**don't suck near her vaginal opening, it could be dangerous**. Use your hands to part her lips so you can have a real good look at what's down there (now is a great time for the "your pussy is so fucking sexy" line). Tease her a little. Little flicks followed by a nice long stroke up the whole length are real nice. Some girls like a soft bite with the teeth, but be gentle—it's very delicate tissue down there.

### 3. Use your hands and face

Let your hands get in on the action. Put a finger or two into her vagina. If she's not all lubed up yet, use some flavored lube or one that has no taste (Slippery Stuff is my favorite). Move your fingers in and out of her snatch a little while you are licking away. And don't be afraid to bury your whole face in her. Nothing says "I love your hot snatch" better than being up to your eyeballs in pussy.

### 4. Go beyond

Speaking of hands, you should feel free to roam outside her pussy while all this is going on. Some girls really like anal stimulation while being eaten. Maybe try playing with her asshole first, not actually going in, just massaging around it. If you want to dive in there, and you think she is game for that kind of play, make sure your finger is nice and lubed up, either from

her pussy juice or lube (**but remember, once you have stuck your finger in her ass, don't put it back in her pussy**). If you can reach, try fondling her breasts or stomach. Feel on her skin. Maybe she wants you to hold her hand. You have two hands—use 'em.

#### 5. Try to read her body language

If she won't tell you what she likes, try and read her body language. If she is bucking her hips towards you, she may want you to lick harder, if she is pulling away, slow down and lighten up. If she is a new partner, reading her maybe hard, but if you are paying attention to her, you should be able to gather some idea of what she's feeling.

#### 6. Take it a step further

I know this may sound impossibly dykey for some of you straight kids out there, but a dildo in her pussy while you are giving her head can be an amazing thing. She gets the double treat of being filled up while being eaten out and you still have your hands free to roam her body. With practice, you can even control the dildo with your chin (although they do make harnesses for this very purpose).

#### 7. Don't kill yourself

A good pussy lickin' can go on for a long time and you, the licker, can get sore. If your neck starts to give out, stop for few minutes and continue playing with her pussy with your hands. Or switch positions. Maybe she wants to straddle your face. It gives your neck a rest and puts her in more control of the action.

#### 8. Don't stop!

OK, you've finally gotten to the point where she is about to come, now is *not* the time to start varying your stroke. If you can tell she is about to come, keep the rhythm and stroke consistent, especially listen for words like "Yes, that's it" "or "Oh yeah, oh yeah." If your neck or tongue starts to hurt now, do your best to not stop. If your tongue hurts, try moving only your neck. If your neck hurts, try moving only your tongue. Or switch to your fingers, but don't bring that poor girl up the mountain only to stop short of the summit.

#### 9. Don't rush away

So you've made it though and have pleased your lady, don't just rush away from her pussy. Keep your mouth on her all the way through her orgasm (maybe suck her clit a little while she's coming) and for a few seconds more. When you're sure she's done (maybe she wants another round) or she signals that she wants you out of there, go up and give her a big long kiss (you might want to wipe your face a little—not all girls want their juice all over their own face) and thank her for letting you do that to her.

### A few words on sucking cock

I have to admit I have limited experience when it comes to cocksucking and I feel it's only fair to at least touch on the subject. Some of the general principles of muff diving apply to dick sucking: Let them know you love their cock or at least act like it. Use varied strokes and get your hands in on the actions. Try and read your partners reactions to various techniques.

But there is more to it, so I asked a few friends who actually *like* cock to give me some tips and their advice follows.

One quick word to you boys: I know it may look sexy in the movies, but most people don't really appreciate having your cock shoved down their throat while you are grabbing their ears. Let the blow jobber control the amount they are taking in. Choking people is just not sexy.

OK, here's what my cocksucking friends have to say. Thanks to BD, CB and AH:

- "This may be appropriate because it is a tip I learned in high school. When blowing a guy, always cover your teeth with your lips as if you had no teeth, had taken your dentures out, and your lips curled in over your gums. Much more of a velvety blow this way."
- "I really have found that including the balls in the activity as a whole is enjoyable. This way he feels me kissing and sucking beginning at the balls and then continuing up with the sucking pressure gradually increasing then just enveloping the entire dick like a lollipop."
- "My favorite thing when giving head to boys is to *avoid* doing it for as long as possible. Not because it's gross (though it can be, especially when they haven't washed in a while), but because of the teasing factor. Talk about being in control. Ha! And then, of course, when the deed is being done, there's the good old perineum push with a digit. (note: some guys like a finger up the ass as well, and no, it doesn't mean they are gay) And then, I think that it is important for all of us cock suckers to remember that it is not necessary to put the whole damn think in our mouths at once and that hands are most certainly allowed, especially with firm pressure on the cock base."

Well, I hope that helps somewhat. Being a good pussy-eater or dick-licker isn't hard; it just takes some practice, dedication and desire to please. And guys, if you want to sound in on the subject, I've love to hear what you think makes a great blowjob. E-mail me at [diysex@punkplanet.com](mailto:diysex@punkplanet.com). ☺

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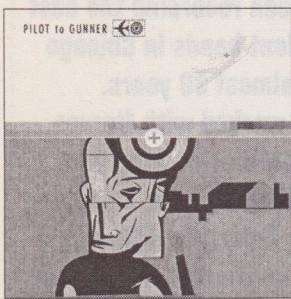
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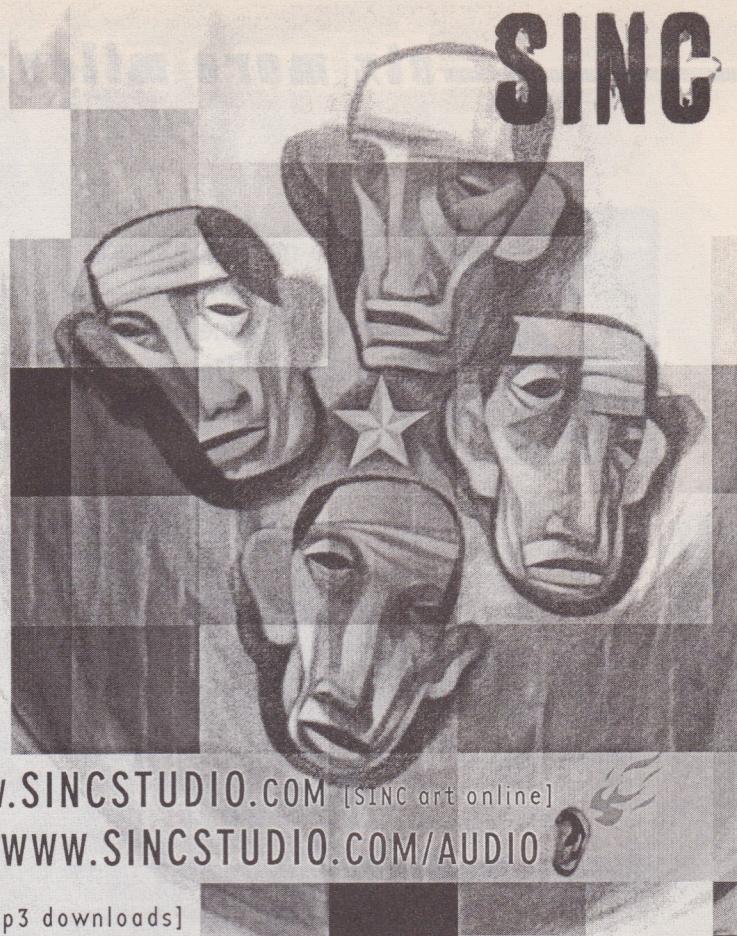
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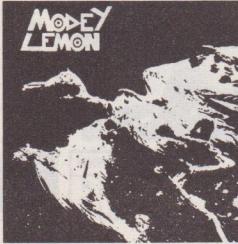


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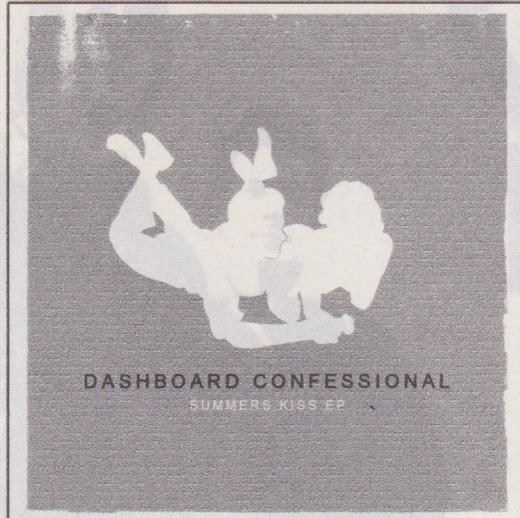
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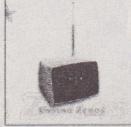
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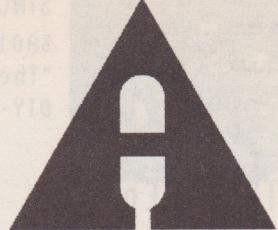


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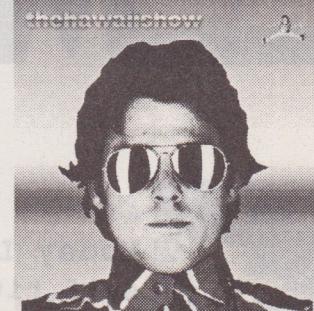
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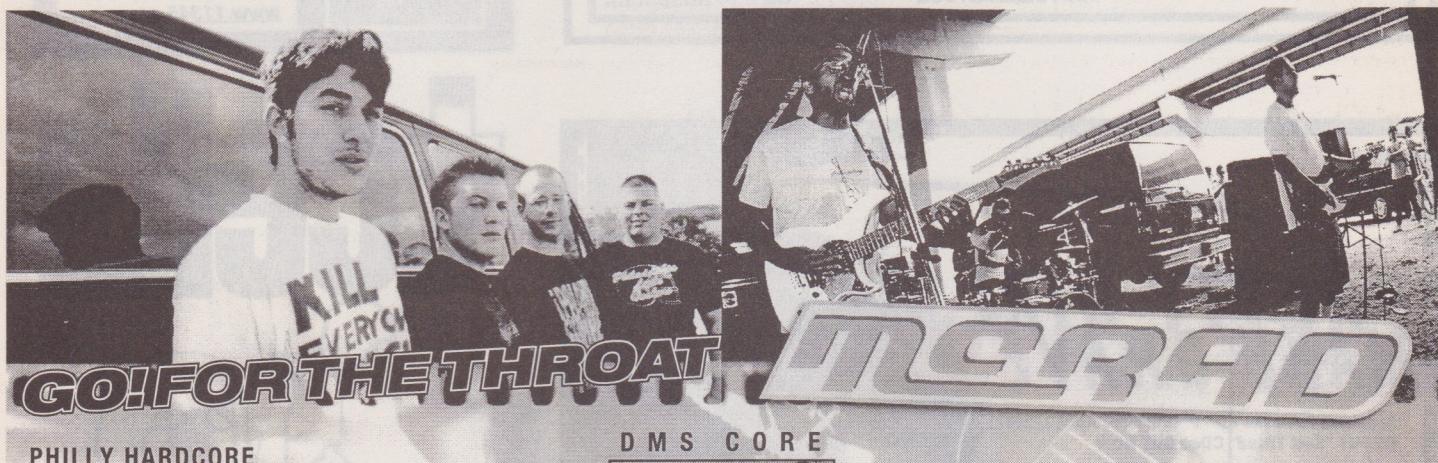
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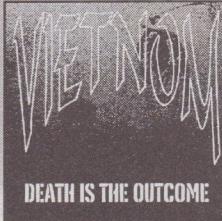
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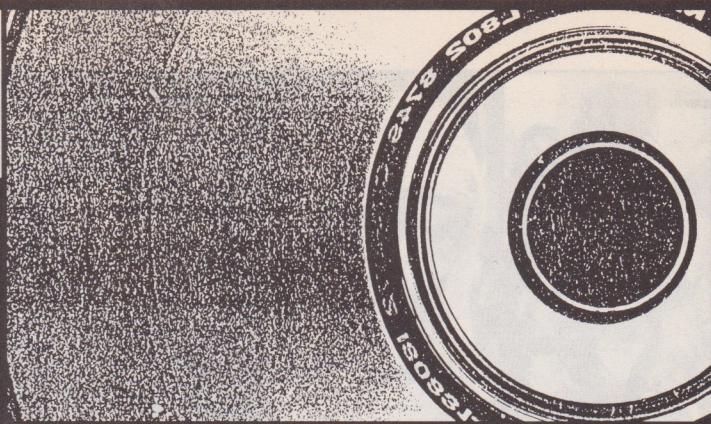
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# PLASTIC MUSIC



**The Actual - The Red EP, CD** The Actual. Trippy name, man. Sounds a lot like one of those pop-metal bands that were the big thing the last few years. I don't understand the sensibility that is attracted to a chunky heavy metal verse and then an upbeat arpeggio soft rock chorus. The Actual sound pretty virtual to me (sorry, couldn't resist). (DAL)

Missing Sequences, 7095 Hollywood Blvd. No. 626, Hollywood, CA 90028-8903

**Adam West - Flower, Fist, and Bestial Wail, 7"** This is a tough review, the songs and motif of the single is biker all the way. It even includes "Where Eagles Dare" a song that does not have any reason to be covered anymore unless it is Halloween and you are in a Misfits cover band. This band has a huge discography including multiple Misfits, Stooges covers, hell they even covered the Cough/Cool single. I am so torn because Steve Baise from the Devil Dogs and Vikings wrote a song on the B-side so I had to give this a chance. I liked the Hookers, and Nashville Pussy, but this may be a bit too much. (EA)

Stereodrive Records Von-Steuben Str.17, 48143 Muenster, Germany

**Adam West - Right On!, CD** Great biker motif on this disc that makes it awful fun to read and look at while enduring the music. Twelve cock-rock inspired songs that are so filled with Southern love that it is almost tongue-in-cheek. It's not. (EA)

[www.thetelegraphcompany.com](http://www.thetelegraphcompany.com)

**Amputee Set/ Sutek Conspiracy - split 7"** A.S. scream out one sub-par ditty that lasts way too long, while S.C. fare better with similar style vocals and crunchy, heavily distorted guitars on 3 quick tracks. I'll pass on the first course, but have another helping of the second. (JG)

Interference Records, 1810 Riback Rd. Columbia, MO 65201

**9 Angel Crew - Another Day Living in Hatred, CD** So self defeating when we compartmentalize ourselves, living out the commodified image sold through the myriads of mass media. Where is the freedom, the self autonomy, the individuality in totally formulaic and pre-approved expression? More than anger, it saddens. Predictable and drowning in testosterone, the Angel Crew, featuring former members of Length of Time, Deviate, and Backfire!, have made for your listening pleasure a typical NYC hardcore record, void of compassion, understanding, or intelligence. Can we move past the Cro-Mags sound and progress? Jesus, yeah, life can be hard and vicious and ugly, but how the hell is it supposed to get any better with this sort of approach. Shit man, have a

sense of humor. If you're down with pantera-esque riffs and anger laden lyrics about taking it all out on someone in a beatdown, rock on. Angel Crew, please add me to your fuck you list. Fuck this. (GBS)

Good Life Recordings PO Box 114 8500 Kortrijk, Belgium

**Angels in the Architecture - The Distance in Writing, CD** You're on tour with the band, having breakfast at an IHOP in Nebraska on a cloudy morning. That's what it evokes for me. Must be the droopy vocals that pour over the melody like so much strawberry syrup. My roommate says they sound like the Smoking Popes, minus the loungey-inflections and with a heavier sound. I buy that. There's something about these guys that makes you think you've heard them before. Not in a negative, knock-off sort of way, but then not in a positive, nostalgic sort of way, either. It's just sort of cloyingly user-friendly, almost like hard rock show tunes. (DAL)

Law of Inertia Productions, [www.lawofinertia.com](http://www.lawofinertia.com)

**9 The Appleseed Cast - Low Level Owl: Volume 1, CD** An experiment that could only result from following ones heart, Low Level Owl: vol. 1 is a beautiful quilt of varied musical textures. Carefully layering simple, often clean, riffs over delayed single notes, to create multiple harmonies melded with thunderous beats and nearly hypnotic loops, this recording gives sound and space dimension seldom stumbled upon within the recording studio. Intricately decorated with sparse arrangements of either guitar or piano, this record seems based on the fact that the vibe comes first and foremost and that every instrument is just that, an instrument, and nothing more; a mere tool to establish a greater whole. Though going into the songs, the sampled interludes can get repetitive. At times haunting, I have read that Low Level Owl: Vol. 1 is meant to be accompanied by Vol. 2. As I have yet to hear the second volume, I can't say much more; but this record stands on its own. (GBS)

Deep Elm Records Inc PO Box 36939 Charlotte, NC 28236 [www.deepelm.com](http://www.deepelm.com)

**Asunder/Like Flies on Flesh - Split, CD** If you're down with Diocide, then you're down with Asunder. I am not. As for Like Flies of Flesh, I was into this whole "All Life Is In Vain" nonsense when I was in 8th grade, digging on Morbid Angel 'cause it scared the shit out of people. Now, while I may be able to listen to this high gain, screeching drama, I can't take it seriously. (GBS)

Life is Abuse PO Box 20524 Oakland, CA 94620 [www.lifeisabuse.com](http://www.lifeisabuse.com)

**A**bout our new review section: We still review all the records we receive, but we only give longform reviews to records our review staff decides they want to highlight. Those reviews are marked with an ear icon, which signifies that they deserved another listen... or something like that. That doesn't mean the ones that get short reviews aren't worthy, just that the reviewer decided that they could write about another record better. That also doesn't mean that all the ear-marked reviews are positive, just that a reviewer had something to say about them. Also, we now give each reviewer a "spotlight" section, where they can write about an old album they really liked and write about what they're currently listening to, which should give you, the reader, a better feel for what that reviewer's got going on—which in turn allows you to make a more informed decision about whether or not you agree with said reviewer. Finally, If a reviewer doesn't like your record, that doesn't mean that it's totally terrible or anything like that. It's not institutional policy that your record is good or that it's bad, it's just one reviewer's opinion—so don't freak out. We're sure you put a good deal of work into your project, and that alone is certainly worth some congratulations! But please, if you're pissed at a review, remember: it's not Punk Planet, it's just one reviewer.

**The Atari Star- And Other Smaller, Brighter Worlds, CD** I thought this was really bad at first, but it's not quite as bad. They have that post-Cap'n Jazz, Midwest indie sound. Whatever that means. The songs are mostly somber, but some get poppy, almost '80s sounding, with soft, slightly odd vocals, like the singer just went through puberty. Not my cup of tea, but tea isn't even my cup of tea. (NS)  
Johann's Face, PO Box 479164, Chicago, IL 60647

**Azure Ray - November, CD** I play the cello. So does the person doing the instrumentals that accompany this sweet female duet from Athens. I secretly like R.E.M. I bet these women do too. (AE)  
Saddle Creek, PO Box 8554, Omaha, NE 68108-0554

**The Backstabbers - To Eleven, CD** Heavy Rock and Roll much like Zeke, Turbonegro, or the New Bomb Turks. The reason that I mention Zeke first is because the release was recorded in Seattle, which is where I'm sure these guys get a lot of their inspiration. There are some rad solos and excellent breakdowns which make this band a bit more original than most of the bands of this genre...then again I think every one of the bands listed has rad solos and excellent breakdowns, so what I meant to say was its all in the delivery. (TK)  
Dead Beat Records PO Box 283 Los Angeles, CA 90078

**Backstabbers Inc - While You Were Sleeping, CD** Louder than a fucking bomb. Formerly known as Life Passed On, another a mix of all that is concrete and heavy within hardcore, thrash and grind. Umm, not that bad. The movie sound bites are cool. I wonder if the throat of vocalist Ryan hurts after shows. (GBS)  
TRASHart [sound and culture] PO Box 725 Providence, RI 02901 www.soundandculture.com

**Baltimore in Love - S/T, CDEP** Sappy rock that doesn't sway too much from one style. A lot of whiny lyrics, half being in Spanish. I really enjoy listening to bands from different countries... most of the time. (TK)

cc 01 (1653) villa ballester, Buenos Aires, Argentina

**The Beltones - Cheap Trinkets, CD** One of those bands that seems to always be playing and I just never checked out—I'm kicking myself for it now. Melodic street punk, the teenage rock n' roll abandon and broken down dreams of The Beltones grants Cheap Trinkets a warm vibe as pure as a howl from the gut. Vocalist Bill McFadden seems to have studied Leatherface's Frankie Stubbs school of singing, at times reminiscent of Matt Freeman or Darius Koski's growl and the sound of American Steel's second record. Relying on simplicity, solid rhythm, and emotion rather than beefy musicianship (not that musicianship is lacking), this record has an undeniable blues feel that gives The Beltones heart. A single guitar playing in a time different than the rest of the band, instead of mixing up a flurry of a steroid charged notes, and the resulting harmony gives songs like "Better Than a Kick in the Head" and "Garbage Picker" depth telling that these cats are playing for the long haul; writing out of love for the song, rather than just something to do. There's a certain timbre to The Beltones that is familiar to the stuff coming out of Gainesville, Florida right now. I guess I shouldn't be surprised; it was mastered there. Regardless, The Beltones' "Cheap Trinkets" is a solid rock n' roll record. (GBS)

TKO Records 410a 24th St. #103 San Francisco, CA 94114 www.tkorecords.com

**Benton Falls - Fighting Starlight, CD** This Santa Rosa band has a very straightforward and mellow sound. Above average musicianship and good songwriting. The most mentionable aspect of this CD to me is the recording. I usually don't enjoy a really clean sound, but this is the perfect mix for this band's chill indie rock styling. (TK)  
Deep Elm Records PO Box 36939 Charlotte, NC 28236

**Biscayne - You'd Build a Robot, CD** Pretty-damn-catchy-above-average-pop-punk. The topic of girls is covered in all its pop-punk complexity, and the guitars at times scream out in that 'rock star' way. Sugar-coated more like snorting pixie-stix than chewing hubba-bubba. (JG)  
Quincy Shanks PO Box 3035 St. Charles, IL 60174

**Black Brick Kiss- When the Fire In Your Eyes Turn to Ashes, CD** The name of this band perfectly describes their sound. Dark, emotional, and hard-hitting, this feels like a sucker-punch in the middle of the night from a jilted lover. Aggressive, melodic punk definitely reminiscent of Dag Nasty (in fact, there is even one cover tune). Chunky, head-bobbing riffs, sinister breakdowns, and vocals with that guttural heartbleeding appeal make this one of the better reviews in my batch. (JG)  
Serenity Records, 803 Thomas Ave. St. Paul, MN 55104 -  
www.blackbrickkiss.com

**Blue/Green Heart - Self Esteem Through Modern Science, 7"** Hard to get a read on these guys from this worthwhile but inconsistent record. They come out fighting, cranking some earnest punk pop with nice machine gun drums and catchy riffs. The intensity and the style reminded me a little bit of Down by Law. The other songs go off in some different directions. More open space, more atonality, more improvisational breaks, more experimenting with speed changes and unabashed noise. I respect them for mixing it up, but too many strong moments go undeveloped and unrealized. Lots of this single comes off as a hodge podge, although I would be curious what these guys come out with next. (DAL)  
Iodine Recordings, 1085 Commonwealth Avenue, PMB 318, Boston, MA 02215

**Bluetip - Post Mortem Anthem, CD** I am not sure how this took so long to review it, but it needs to be done nonetheless. I am proud to say that I love Bluetip and this comes from an unlikely source. I am more of a rock and roller and normally frown upon today's "emo" music that Bluetip get associated with. I did love Rites of Spring and that era of punk at the time, but today – well. Bluetip are made up of some veterans (Swiz, Sweetbelly Freakdown) of the DC scene so they know what works. This release has five tracks taken from previous sessions that were never quite finished, 'till now. It also has five previously released songs that are now out of print from singles and such. Jay Robbins of Jawbox/Burning Airlines turns the knobs for most of the songs on this disc. I am not so sure what appeals to me about this band while finding most of their contemporaries gut-churning. They have quite a few releases out there and you can probably start here as well as anywhere. Bluetip reminds me that good music = good music, no matter what. I need to give more things a chance, why don't you? (EA)  
Dischord Records

**Boilermaker - Leucadia, CD** I believe this is a compilation of previously released 7"s and such. Dating back to 1994, this album brings back a release every two years up to 1998 from this very well known San Diego indie rock trio. Very listenable. You can easily tell how the band progressed from their beginnings. I actually wish more bands would do this. For those who already own the previous releases this album is sporting, there are 2 extra unreleased tracks from last year to tickle your ears with melodic loveliness. (TK)  
Better Looking Records 11041 Santa Monica Blvd, PMB 302 Los Angeles, California 900025-3525

**Boxcar Satan - Crooked Mile March, CD** Rowdy Texan lounge music. A sprinkle of Sonic Youth, a dash of El Duce, and a pinch of Mr. Bungle mixed with 2 parts of Jack Daniels makes this some decent barroom swill. I bet they'd be cool to see live. (JG)  
Dog Fingers Recordings PO Box 2433 San Antonio, TX 78298

**Brass Castle - The John Derek, 7"** There's some pretty skillful playing on this EP. Brass Castle translate solid honky tonk chops into something

## REVIEWER SPOTLIGHT: Art Ettinger (AE)

I never thought the day would come that kids into punk didn't worship BAD RELIGION, but that day is apparently here. With all the genres and sub-genres of punk and hardcore out there, and with B.R. having put out so many mediocre albums, it's no wonder that most young punks haven't heard Bad Religion's "Suffer" LP from 1988. Dropping this onto the scene a couple of years after hardcore's prime, B.R. blew everyone away with this melodic (but not really poppy) hardcore classic. The pseudo-sophisticated lyrics with misplaced SAT vocabulary words (the word "surfeit," which I learned from this album, actually WAS on my SAT's) have a distinct catchiness to them, from the atheist anthem "Do What You Want" to the sociopolitical gem "Part II: the Numbers Game." Clocking in at just 26 minutes, this 15-song slab of punk perfection hasn't grown old at all since I first heard it twelve or so years back. Every pre and post- "Suffer" B.R. album has at least one or two great songs on it, but their only other essential albums are 1982's "How Could Hell Be Any Worse?" (or the CD compilation "80-85") and 1989's "No Control." The band is still worth seeing live, although now they play many more mediocre songs than they did when I first saw them on the "Against the Grain" tour in 1991.

This month I've been listening to the ANTISEEN double live LP, the debut 7" from Caustic Christ, the Limp Wrist LP, the A.O.D. demos compilation LP, The Devil is Electric CD, and the Silver Tongued Devils LP. I've also been watching VH-1's hate rock special repeatedly. And okay, I'll admit it— I've been listening to the new Bad Religion album, "The Process of Belief," a heck of a lot as well.

hard to classify but easy to like. Nice diversity of tunage on the record, as well. Side A is upbeat, all starts and stomps and fancy guitar riffs, then Side B slows it down and makes you think of ex-lovers and old addresses. The wailing vocals are pretty raw and pretty real. (DAL)  
Drazzig, 335 Elmira Pl. NE, Atlanta, GA 30307

**Bright Calm Blue – no title, 7"** The music and emotion is heavy. Vocals range from whispers to melodic gut-wrenching screams. Pretty catchy, but more Bruce Banner than Incredible Hulk. (JG)  
Independence Day, PO Box 82192 Tampa, FL 33682

**Capture the Flag - Walking Away from Everything, CD** Sounds much like later Lifetime or early Saves The Day. There are quite a few more metal riffs than I was expecting, which was a nice surprise. Even though I liked most of the songs on this release, the more popular this genre of high-energy sappy punk gets, the less excited I am to hear it. (TK)  
Conquer the World records, PO Box 40282 Redford, MI 48240

**Caufield - ...sleep tight, ya morons, CD** Fairly standard pop punk. Vocalist sounds like Ben Weasel. Very catchy. I also thought the artwork was pretty cool. Outside is a peaceful suburban scene, and on the inside....well, you are just gonna have to buy this from the discount bin in a month to find out. (TK)  
Storm Records PO Box 151 Royal Oak, MI 48068

**The Cause - Human Condition, CD** The Cause is distributed by Revelation Records if that means anything to you. Great packaging with some dope photos of SF (415 represent!!) and some neat quotes from Brecht and Wilde—but it doesn't save the record. Six Hardcore songs packed into less than fifteen minutes...blah blah blah...nothing new. (GBS)  
Ides of March Records PO Box 722 Wappingers Falls, NY 12590 www.atdawn-wowagewar.com

**Cave In - Two Songs, CD** Two tracks, also available as a 7". I really don't like this mainstream sounding tripe one bit. Reminds me of an even worse Pearl Jam or something. This could easily make it on mainstream alternative radio if the songs were a little shorter. (AE)  
Hydra Head Records, PO Box 990248, Boston, MA 02199

**9 Cavity - On The Lam, CD** First off, these guys and their label are getting ripped for sending some generic artwork promo release kind of thing. It didn't even contain song listings! How about I say that there are some cool songs on here called..."I don't fucking know" and "They wouldn't tell me!" Now back that down off of the internet. I always thought that the music and the artwork worked together, but I guess not. I just imagine a band laboring over the artwork, only to have the label send this out! Remember, people do judge a book by the cover.

Anyhow, this is big thick riff rock that falls somewhere between Fu Manchu and any of sludgy grind type bands. Think Sabbath on ludes. But where Ozzy and co wrote decent songs, Cavity only has occasional, buried, unrecognizable vocalizations. They're just that stuck in the riff. Depending upon your mood and the spirits imbibed, this is either a fuckin' rock out banger or pure boredom. (AS)  
Hydra Head Records, PO Box 990248, Boston, MA 02199

**The Chase Theory - ...In Pursuit Of Excellence, CDEP Bleeeorg!** Bad modern emo/indie rock with annoying vocals. The only good thing about this band is that they have a split 7" with Ex Number Five. Check them out instead. (NS)  
Onedaysaviour Records, PO Box 372, Williston Park, NY 11596

**9 Chiyoko - Cinematic, CD** Strong female vocals combined with string arrangements and live instruments, which float in and out of an electronica dreamscape. I really didn't want to compare this to Bjork, but the influence is definitely there. Unlike everyone's favorite Icelander, Chiyoko lacks a certain singleness in personality for which I have a sweet tooth for. The title track "cinematic" definitely stands out with its layered effects, interesting song structure, and lounge-like vocals. The production on this is very polished, and this is definitely not a weak release...but I can imagine better. (JG)  
Boo-the-Cat Records, 1659 N. Milwaukee Ave., PMB 151 Chicago, IL 60647

**9 Noam Chomsky—An American Addiction Drugs, Guerillas, Counterinsurgency: US Intervention in Colombia, CD** Painfully methodical and intricately detailed, An American Addiction opens with the statement "If you want to find out what's going on in the world, there are a number of vantage points. A good one is to ask where the arms are, where the military forces are—the arms, the military training and so on. That happens to be an easy question for us to answer." Indicting the United States government while daring its citizens to call for accountability, Chomsky's latest for Alternative Tentacles and AK Press is nothing new to activists and scholars of dissent. Recorded two years ago at Roxbury Community College in Boston, the famed linguist talks the audience step by step through the importance of examining foreign policy in its relation to lobby groups and big business, yankee intervention following the second world war, the economic necessity of the drug trade, and consequently the drug war, and the underlying role of free market practice amid all of this. However, in these times where terrorism is the latest witch hunt and media catch phrase, this recording takes on a new dimension—specifically in recognizing the roots of terrorism, its long term effects, and the United States covert role in terrorism across the globe. Citing

**REVIEWER SPOTLIGHT: Andy Slob (AS)**

Boy these things are so much fun. Sure I could tell you that you should seek out Decontrol's "Songs From The Gut" album for a good gruff blast of punk rock while keeping in mind to avoid any of their other releases, but the truth is that I only happened onto the record because it looked interesting and had a price tag stating a \$1.99. I'm not going to pretend that I'm cool because I have it. It was a damned accident. But truth be told most reviewers for this rag would rather tell you lamenting stories about sitting through the stacks of crap that they're given for review each issue. Mindless trivial trash whose only worth is for the players of which to state that "Yes, I have a CD out. My mom has it on her mantle!" I've been doing this for a couple of years now and out of the hundred or more releases that I've gotten I could only really recommend about three. Sorry musical climate? I don't know, that's ultimately for the buyers to decide. There must be closets full of unsold releases in nearly every home in the world. Please think about your band and it's recordings. Ask the appropriate questions. Would I even purchase this myself? Is this the next big thing? Is this only just "okay". Is this just another tenth generation something something? Please wait for something dynamic to come out of your experience before sharing. Please! Then again, just trade songs over the internet. Now I must call Jim, drink a beer, and then watch Survivor. Be good and be careful. We are listening.

**Other shit that I've accidented upon recently:** the Plastic Ono Band, Mr. Dibbs, and the zine, Ripped and Clipped.

Clinton's Plan Colombia, Chomsky lifts the righteous veil of humanitarian intervention and moralism to expose the continued practice of imperialism. Referencing the Jesuits, witnesses and survivors of decades of state sponsored terror all over Latin America, Chomsky outlines the culture of terror born out of this societal mode, one in which "people's aspirations are domesticated with regards to alternatives different from those of the powerful. In other words, you lose hope." Most importantly, in addressing audience questions, An American Addiction closes with Chomsky's critical assessment that "We misunderstand what's going on in the world unless we see the patterns. We're not talking about the problems of Colombia, Turkey, Bolivia, East Timor and so on, we're talking about the United States. These problems trace back here." The knowledge Chomsky drops here is well worth a mere fifty minutes out of your schedule. (GBS) Alternative Tentacles Records PO Box 419092, San Francisco, CA 94141-9092 AK Press 674-A 23rd Street, Oakland, CA 94612-1163

**Civic Minded Five - E=CM5 Trackin' the Bacon Train, 2xCD** Two CD's full of fast, silly, sloppy and angry hardcore. The production is a tad bit better on E=MC5. (BC)

Recess Records PO Box 1666 San Pedro, CA 90733

**Cream Abdul Babar - The Catalyst to Ruins, CD** If you can get past the worryingly dim name, this is decent aggressive hardcore with an industrial influence and lots of experimentation with "builds." They supposedly even bleed on stage. (AE)

At a Loss Recordings, PO Box 3597, Annapolis, MD 21403

**Cretin 66 - Demolition Safari, CD** Guitar heavy furious rock and roll. With titles like "Bang yer fuckin head" and "She don't like Bad Brains, " your lame ass should get the picture. (BC)

Steel Cage Records PO Box 29247 Philadelphia, PA 19125

**Crispus Attucks - Red Black Blood Attack, CD** 1980's hardcore-old skool style! The rhythm pounds and grooves, and the lead singer's throat might flop into your lap at any second. Speaking of seconds, the socio-political themes would make Kevin Seconds yell "SATYAGRAHA!!". (JG)

Soda Jerk Records, PO Box 4056 Boulder, CO 80306

**Crush Kill Destroy - Punctuate Our Phrases, CD** Weak, mellow indie rock, with random chunks of vocals predominately in monotone. When the songs do seem to pick up it seems too little, too late. Definitely not the impact implied by the band's moniker. Isn't that ironic?? (JG)

Makoto Recordings, PO Box 50403 Kalamazoo, MI 49005

**Danse Manatee - no title, CD** Very ambitious, art project experimental music that, with the exception of the buried, heavily effected vocals, falls somewhere between Faust and a more mellow Boredoms. I will be

tossing this on at my next wine, cheese, and crackers soiree. (AS)  
Catsup Plate Records, PO Box 1277, New York, NY 10276

**9 d.b.s., "Forget Everything You Know," CD** This Canadian group has been around for nine years. The liner notes are a thanks it's been great letter to people which makes it sounds like they're quitting, although that's not totally clear. If so it's a loss, because they're a fine band. With a from-the-gut sounds reminiscent of Braid and lyrics like "Static is on the car radio / Roll down the window / it's just like summer," this 5-song EP is good for a road trip, and what's higher praise than that? What keeps the album from being great is that so much thought has clearly been put into the original, extraordinary musical arrangements that the vocals seems kind of like an afterthought at times. The best moments are instrumental. (DAL)

Ache Records, PO Box 138, 1001 W. Broadway #101, Vancouver BC, V6H 4E4, Canada

**The Deadbeats - S/T, 7"** Straight ahead rock and roll that could have been found on MTV around 1992 or so. With the popular music going from pop-punk to hip-hop it is no surprise that the punk seen has rebelled with a lot of guitar driven stuff. Hellacopters fans apply here. (EA)  
[www.thetelegraphcompany.com](http://www.thetelegraphcompany.com)

**Deadbolt - Hobo Babylon, CD** These guys think they're the scariest band in the world. Bullshit. Instead you get a hit or miss rockabilly-surf blend that's luckily more hit than miss. (AE)

Cargo, 4901-906 Morena Blvd., San Diego, CA 92117-3432

**Dewey Defeats Truman - The Road to Nowhere Maps, CD** Okay weenie indie pop rock played by weenies. I like this actually. Does that make me a weenie? Think Pavement or a similar band, only with better songwriting skills. (AE)

Has Anyone Ever Told You?, PO Box 161702, Austin, TX 78716-1702

**Dialog Cet - NY Metall, CD** They're from Sweden AND have funny titles for their songs, like "I suck my falafel" and "Bald Eagles Making Love" ...but it's not the Swedish punk I have come to grow and love. All instrumental using the same formula of taking a simple melody and playing it over and over and over and over and over....I'm dazed and confused and dizzy and annoyed. (JG)

Car Crash Records Sweden, PO Box 39 / 462 21 Vanersborg , Sweden

**Division of Laura Lee - Pretty Electric, 7"** Above average, punk flavored, alternative rock that has enough musical imagination to keep things interesting. It's the Offspring meet Echo and The Bunnymen. (AS)  
Stereodrive! Rec., Von-Steuben-Str. 17, 48143 Muenster, Germany

**REVIEWER SPOTLIGHT: Brian Czarnik (BC)**

RUSH-2112. WHAT the Hell! That's right kiddies I am going to review the ultimate anti-punk, anti-cool, anti-chick record "2112" from the nerd core band (before there was nerd core) RUSH! (I can just feel all the punk planeters rolling their eyes now). (ed note: I had way too many roommates that loved this band, sorry Bri but they do suck, ha). Since there is no Punk Planet data base on all of our self indulgent reviewer spotlight reviews I think it is safe to say that we have come close to covering all the punk gems you should own. So in my quest to think outside the box I am reviewing a record that no true punk would ever own or admit to own for that matter. This is the first piece of vinyl I ever got my tiny hands on when my mother brought it home from a garage sale because it had a cool cover and she thought I might like it. Well, it took me like two years to understand it, but when I finally got into Rush (the long haired Canadian classic rock band who sings "Tom Sawyer" with that high pitched singer and that Neil Peart guy on drums) this record NEVER left my turn table. The musicianship on this record is top notch with all three members playing their collective hearts out. And the record is a concept album that takes place in the year 2112 (it actually came out in 1976) and deals with a man finding some musical instruments and then reporting back to some court of elders. Side one is one frigid song for crying out loud! And side two has the best Rush ballad in "Tears" and probably the hardest rocking Rush song in "Something for Nothing." If you like your music to take you on a mystic journey then this is the record for you. Rush is the thinking man's band (read: this is a computer geek type band that not a lot of girls like at all!) and you just might like them if you give them a try. Their singer Geddy Lee sang on Bob and Doug McKenzie's Great White North song. And they have put out some fine records in the past 3 or so decades. (Okay maybe just in the 70's and 80's.) So go down to the used record store and give them a listen. You will love them or hate them. As for me, since I can't find a girlfriend in Tampa at all these days (briczar@juno.com for applications), they seem to be the band of the moment for me.

**Five decent Rush records (excluding "2112"):** "Hemispheres", "Farewell to Kings", "RUSH", "Moving Pictures" (it has Tom Sawyer on it), and "Fly by Night."

**DQE - The Queen of Mean, CD** This CD can and will be enjoyed by anyone who listens to it. All the best aspects of 50's Rock and Roll, Rockabilly, and Country. This CD is really fucking great. The first song, (and the one that had my crusty roommates dancing all over the place) is a song called GoBananas. It consists of a toe tapping tune and bananas. One of the coolest things about this CD is replacing the lyrics with pictures that describe the song perfectly. This shit is just so good! Grace Braun has a perfect voice and knows how to use it. It just makes me happy. (TK)

Dark Beloved Cloud PO Box 2096 Grand Central Station New York, NY 10163

**9 The Dragons - Rocknroll Kamikaze, CD** There's something almost intoxicating about the way they go "whooooooooo yeah!" Their harmonies are catchy in an almost unprecedently nasally way. The Dragons deliver fun, drunk, shit-kicking kung fu rock and roll ala the Humpers. Good atmospheric CD package, too, the red and black photos, the rising sun artwork. The band photo has them all in black, the mop-topped Ian Svenonius look-alike punching up at the sky. Great lyrics like, "So I call you up and say baby how you been, you're my Brigitte Bardot, and I'm your Errol Flynn" help make this a keeper of an album. (DAL)

Junk Records, 576 N. Bellflower #338, Long Beach, CA 90814

**Electrelane- Rock It To The Moon, CD** Really cool organ drenched instrumentals that set my house aglow for a good afternoon of housecleaning. If they added some hot vocals/lyrics, it would be the winner of the month. Glad to hear some people pushing the musical envelope. Hope that Pink Floyd doesn't sue them for the barking dogs! (AS)

Mr. Lady Records

**Electric Frankenstein – Sick as a Dog / Sex and Dying in High Society, 7"** Is anyone else sick of this band. Of course it sounds good, and the songs are tight and you have heard it all before (at least the X cover). I once opened for this band in NYC and they were too cool to hang out, plus their manager screwed us out of our money because EF had a guarantee. Of course they got paid, we barely didn't and they invited us to play and drive 8 hours to get there, fuckers. I hope their master plan works and they make it big. (EA)

[www.thetelegraphcompany.com](http://www.thetelegraphcompany.com)

**Emo Summer - Land of dark green leopard tears..., CD** A CD filled with 37 "songs" ranging in length from four seconds to 15 minutes. They all sound the same: grating. This has little to do with emo or summer. More like winter. Long, dreary winter. This is the kind of music they play to flush criminals out of buildings. (DAL)

Nothing Enterprises, 2538 La Mirada Dr., San Jose, CA 95125

**9 Enfold - No Coming Home, CD** About a year previous to this I purchased a split with Enfold and Linsay. I really enjoyed it, but couldn't find anything else by them until now. This is the first Full Length, and it was worth the wait. Enfold is a very political minded metal/screamo band with excellent lyrics covering the same old topics, but with specific examples of what's wrong and opinions on how to change it. Automatically this makes them noteworthy. The lyrics and their explanations are written in English and in German, which is always a positive thing when you are in a band that wants a large international fan base. There is even a note towards the end of the booklet inviting requests for translations or explanations in Spanish, French, or Italian. The hidden track proves that if a band is talented, they can make any song sound cool. I won't tell you what it is, but if you were alive in the late 90's, you will recognize. (TK)

Per Koro Records Markus Haas IM Fehrfeld 26 28203 Bremen Germany

**Epoxyes – Need More Time, 7"** Once in awhile a record screams out after wading through a pile of crappy "emo" records - Wow! If this isn't a breath of fresh air new wave from one of my favorite little labels, Dirlnap Records. The A-side is two great Devo inspired tunes followed by the flipside of an Adam Ant track. This has been on heavy rotation in my household. (EA)

Dirlnap Records PO Box 21249 Seattle, WA 98111

**The Faction – Collection 1982 - 1985, CD** I totally missed out on the Faction during my teen years. Maybe it was the fact that all the US punk albums I bought came from the Import section of Record Town? The Faction were one of the original Thrasher skate rock bands and contained pro skater Steve Caballero. This CD contains all their recorded songs and thanks to the reissuing power of Beer City, here is a treat to all of us who are now in our later years. (SY)

Beer City Records, PO Box 26035, Milwaukee, WI 53226-0035

**REVIEWER SPOTLIGHT: Eric Action (EA)**

I am amazed at how many people younger than I do not own possibly the second best singles collection behind the Buzzcocks "Singles Going Steady." If you do not own SUPERCHUNK'S TOSSING SEEDS (SINGLES 89-91) than you should be embarrassed. Besides having the best anti-boss anthem ever, "Slack Motherfucker" it also has a great Shangri-La's song "Train from Kansas City." Most of the singles on this collection will be impossible to find and very expensive at today's prices, but for one low price you can enjoy the sound that launched a million crappy bands. Mac's vocals are great, because he didn't really try to song as much as he did after Superchunk went soft. The first single has two great punk rock blasts in "What Do I" and "My Noise" with the Shangri-La's on the flipside. Than the anthemic "Slack Motherfucker" and cover of "night Creatures originally done by the Flys. These two songs are worth the price and is the single that made me a fan for life. You get "Garlic" from the Three's Company split single. Then their next three singles with "Fishing, Cool The Breadman, Cast Iron, Seed Toss, It's Hard to fall In Love, and Brand New Love." The last two songs both being covers of Sebadoh tracks. This collection should make you a fan, just be warned the next few releases were great and then Superchunk lost a lot of fans with slower and more alterna-sounding stuff. I happened to grow with them and still even like their latest album (though it had to grow on me). This is chunk at their peek. I want all of you under twenty years old to buy this and skip to track #4, throw it on repeat, and put your car radio up to ten. In a short time you will be singing along and quitting your crappy job at the fast food chain, Kinko's, or the gas station. I am proud that someone will buy this as a result of my rant.

**Tops of my pops:** The Cigarettes 2XLP reissue is a must have, CCR boxset Disc one, new Buff Medways singles, Kill-A-Watts, The Dirty Sweets LP, and bands that I pulled out that haven't been listened to for awhile such as the Misfits, Rezillos, Buzzcocks, later Jam stuff, RFTC self-titled.

**Favorats – Destination Outer Space, 7"** Fast, catchy and jangly pop punk from the Netherlands. Sounds like something that would have been on Lookout in the early 90's. The first song really sounds like it could have been on some Lookout or Very Small compilation. Very toe-tapping. And consistent with most Swedish bands, the packaging is great. A pleasant walk down memory lane. (NS)  
Stardumb, PO Box 21145, 3001 AC Rotterdam, The Netherlands

**The Flaming Stars – Ginmill Perfume, CD** Smokey barroom melodies collected between 1995-2000. All I hear is Lou Reed playing on the jukebox. I need a pint. (JG)

Alternative Tentacles Records, PO Box 419092 San Francisco, CA 94141

**For Instance – S/T, CD** If you got a time machine and transported Good Riddance into the past and put them on Mystic Records, this is what you might have. Fast and clean So Cal punk/hardcore with rough vocals. The singer almost reminds me of Dan O' from NFAA, 411, etc. If Fat Wreck stuff is just a little to poppy for you, then check these guys out. (NS)  
Bitch Slap, PO Box 952, Grover Beach, CA 93483

**The Frustrators – Achtung Jackass, CD** East Bay punk rock lite. These guys sound like a slower, simpler version of Green Day, which seems to resemble the Replacements. And look who we have on bass? Mike Dirnt moonlighting. Their few faster songs are catchy, but this CD is just lacking some oomph or something. I like the lyrics to Hide And Seek (about work) and Pirate Song (about punk pirates) though. Hey, Mike, don't quit your day job! (NS)  
Adeline, 5337 College Ave. #318, Oakland, CA 94611

**Furious IV - ...is that you?, CD** Ultra catchy upbeat California style rock with a polished (but not too polished) sound. Lots of melodic guitar riffs come pouring out from this good band. (BC)  
Pointed Finger Records PO Box 121462 San Diego, CA 92112-1462

**Get Hustle – Who Do You Love, 7"** From the ashes of Antioch Arrow comes Get Hustle and the title track has these discordant jazz style freaks doing a cover of the one song that is impossible to do wrong, Bo Diddley's "Who Do You Love?" Now its sliced and diced into something that could be hard to recognize for the casual listener, but I found it fun. The B-side is more spacey stuff that actually entranced me. (EA)  
Gravity Records PO Box 81332 San Diego, CA 92138

**The Ghost – This Is A Hospital, CD** From the sonically great recording done at Electrical Audio by Steve Albini, to the skilled layout and design put into the packaging, it is obvious that a lot of work has gone

into this release. The Ghost have hit upon a fresh approach to the stale genre of emotional punk. The songwriting is tight and polished, the two guitars dual great leads, and the vocals have a dynamic delivery that keeps me listening with a sincere interest. Is it all luck, or are they that good? I'm keeping my eye on this band and I don't want be disappointed. (SY)

Some Records, 51 MacDougal St. #458, New York, NY 10012

**♀ Ghosts and Vodka – Precious Blood, CD** I was immediately looking forward to hearing this disc based on the packaging alone (The tracks all have separate sheets with cool cartoons and origins of the songs). To add to my excitement, the first statement I read was "I want to salt your poop and wear it on my face like a beard"- THAT'S FUCKING GREAT!! What I wasn't planning on was this being entirely instrumental. Not that I'm not sophisticated enough for this, but the songs would have been so much stronger with vocals. This is like a ham on rye with grey poupon, but NO GODDAMN HAM!! The rest of the sandwich tastes like last week's emo. (JG)  
[www.sixgunlover.com](http://www.sixgunlover.com)

**The Gloryholes – Screamer, 7"** This fits right in with your Spits and Briefs singles. Great punk rock, how often do we call anything punk rock anymore. Its either garage, emo, noisecore, 77", etc. This is just snotty punk rock that you will sing along with. Dirlnap, yeah, yeah, yeah. (EA)  
Dirlnap Records PO Box 21249 Seattle, WA 98111

**♀ Gold Chains – S/T, CDEP** Within a heap of dung lies a chunk of hip-hop fun! Kind of funny how the best CD in my pile of Punk Planet reviews is by a rapper from San Francisco that goes by the name of Gold Chains. Initially I thought this release would be laughable, at best. What I didn't expect was the ignition of the motor booty! Old skool flava flawlessly produced and executed. The beats and lyrics are contagious, yo! Unlike so much horrible hip hop music that is taking place currently, Gold Chains works positively, stating "don't need money, just beats and love"...and in case you wanted his educational background before you hire him to go to work on moving your ass, he has a bass degree- it's his P.H.D.- compliments of Hard Beats University!!  
[www.gold-chains-worldwide.com](http://www.gold-chains-worldwide.com) or [www.musork.com](http://www.musork.com)

**The Green Goblyn Project – No title, CD** Lots of grave robbing songs on this CDr that unfortunately fall somewhere in between the neither good nor bad space in time. Lots of different styles represented without sounding like clichés or copy cats. (AS)  
Bony Orbit Records, PO Box 541244, Merritt Is., FL 32954

## REVIEWER SPOTLIGHT: Dan Laidman (DAL)

**THE ADVERTS—CROSSING THE RED SEA WITH THE ADVERTS.** The story is as old as time itself... two art students go to a punk rock show. It changes their life. They start a band. The band has a good run on some indie labels, then they sign to a major, and everything falls apart. Bankruptcy, animosity, obscurity, oblivion... okay, melodrama aside, this was the story of the Adverts, but it wasn't typical at all. First, it was 25 years ago, second the punk band they saw play that inspired them was the Sex Pistols playing their very first gig, and third, their good run on some indie labels produced some of the best music the genre has ever known. They started in 1976, and in 1979 they collapsed and broke up. But in between the Adverts established themselves as one of the quintessential old school British punk bands, catchier and poppier than most and yet darker, angrier, more wonderfully morbid. When I first got into punk rock I heard their two classics "Bored Teenagers" and "Gary Gilmore's Eyes" on a mix tape, and spent the next two years looking for something else by them. I finally stumbled across "Crossing the Red Sea with the Adverts" in a North Carolina record store. It was my first big record store find. And it's still the sweetest.

**Halifax Pier - Put Your Gloves on and Wave, CD** This music comes across as sad and very laid back. The soft sounds come complete with violins and cellos. (BC)

Temporary Residence Ltd. PO Box 22910 Baltimore, MD 21203

**H.C.A. - Is Good Enough, CD** It's a rare find that you get a CDr for review that really hits the spot. Especially when the band name contains a circle A, and it asks for nudes of hot redheads on the inside, but this hits the old school spot. First and foremost, they have a singer. Not some growler or nasal nose whiner, but good, powerful, clear vocals. Not some operatic bullshit either. This harkens back to the early days of hardcore, think the Vandals or early MIA. The tight playing also hints at this era. Good, solid, not just the root note, bass playing, but with actual base lines. The drums and guitar fit in nicely without sounding like generic Gibsons through Marshalls. The seven songs on here were all a pleasure. Even the lyrics don't seem to run of the mill. Is it kids with original ideas, or maybe just good influences? Isn't everyone sick of the latest distasteful screamo and weasel copy? Can't wait to see these guys grow musically. For fans of early hardcore before everything got all "hard" or "speed metal". Think TSOL's first couple. This effort is ten times more entertaining than any of the big label punk bands. And probably self produced to boot. (AS)

3903 Brazilnut Ave., Sarasota, FL 24234

**Hero of a Hundred Fights - The Cold, CD** Very very tight. This is the most creative music I have actually come in contact with in a few months, so needless to say it blew me away. The music lies somewhere between Fugazi/Schelack/Tool to give you a very small idea what this release could sound like in example. Hints of math rock, very original vocal lines and riff driven melodies are what makes this band so great to listen to. The art on the cover/insert by Nick Slough is enough to sell me though. I was very disappointed with the lack of songs (4 total), but it really is leaving me wanting more. I'm keeping my eyes open for future releases, and you need to give this band a listen. (TK)

Divot Records PO box 14061 Chicago, IL 60614-0061

**The High and the Mighty - S/T, CD** I've never seen a band proudly proclaim "Mixed to MONO" on the back of their record before. They also declare themselves purveyors of the "World's Finest Rock" on their stickers. Appropriate for a band called the High and the Mighty. In case their lo-fi bravado doesn't come through clearly enough in the tuneage, the CD shows a picture of Pabst Blue Ribbon cans and the back cover is a washed out junkyard. The sterling sound of cheap beer and old machines. Kick ass. (DAL)

The High and the Mighty, 4324 NE 47th Ave, Portland, OR 97218

**Human Hamster Hybrids - Dance Classics, CD** Yikes. Here's a German band playing really good English sounding punk, up until the ska kicks in on about half the songs. Man, and they were this close to getting a Snuff comparison. Well, if you like good English pop punk bands or

Less Than Jake and you don't mind ska and horns, then check these guys out. (NS)

<http://www.human-hamster-hybrids.de>

**Ideas Of Space - There are No New Clouds, CD** There are a lot of bands out there that sounds too closely to this band. It is very sad slow rock. It almost sounds like the entire CD was drenched in reverb before it was shipped off to the press. In addition to it sounding like I am sitting in an opera house listening to a mediocre band, they added some effect to the singers voice to make him extra whiney, or maybe that's just the lethargic back up vocals. The artwork is a bit boring too which consists of a bunch of random letters and words scattered about. It is even a little disappointing because they seem to be very good musicians. Now all they need is a hint of originality and they will be able to hit the bandwagon before it reverts to ska's 4th wave. (TK)

Better Looking Records 11041 Santa Monica Blvd, PMB 302 Los Angeles, CA 90025-3525

**The Immortal Lee County Killers / Matching Numbers - Split, 7"** Two gorge rockers get together to battle it out on this split. The question to always ask on a split single is, "Who won?" Is the ILCK from Georgia, USA or the Matching Numbers from Sweden. Tough call the Killers give us a southern fried chicken sound while the Numbers give the Sweden guitar rock that is so popular with the gearheads. It's a good ol' soccer tie, everyone wins! Including you. (EA)

Chicken Ranch Records PO Box 340262 Austin, TX 78732

**In Dying Days - Life As A Balancing Act, CD** Melodic death metal/hardcore that sounds like something out of Sweden, but without the solos and with some more hardcore sounding spoken parts. They write some catchy riffs and melodies, but I think Gothenburg has exhausted this sound. (NS)

Onedaysaviour Records, PO Box 372, Williston Park, NY 11596

**The (International) Noise Conspiracy - Capitalism Stole My Virginity, 7"** Politically charged, but thoughtful and obtuse lyrically, this is some good new wavy pop rock. Two unreleased cuts and an album track. As always the Conspiracy's musical influences are kept at arms length while still sounding original. (AS)

Stereodrive! Rec., Von-Steuben-Str. 17, 48143 Muenster, Germany

**The Intima - 3 song, 7"** In the linear notes it says that this release was funded thanks to a car accident with a Backstreet Boy. That's the most interesting thing I can say about this piece of vinyl. Talented musicians playing diddle-daddle indie rock. (JG)

Post Present Medium PO Box 461360 L.A., CA 90046

**The Jazz June - They Love Those Who Make The Music, CD** A re-release of The Jazz June's 1997 debut. Lyrically and musically creative, I'd imagine this record cared more weight five years ago when it was first released. To the band's honor, but to the short sidedness of the scene,

**REVIEWER SPOTLIGHT: George Sanchez (GBS)**

Beginning with the Billy Bragg/Wilco collaboration of unreleased Woody Guthrie material a few years back, I've head to the hills, so to speak, and begun unearthing folk music. I took the plunge last week and picked up the HARRY SMITH'S ANTHOLOGY OF AMERICAN FOLK MUSIC. This isn't the happy go lucky stereotype of people sitting around a campfire, smiling, hippie shit—or your parents folk music. This anthology is an introduction to an America that nobody ever told us about. Dark, preoccupied with death, romantic, frightening, and releasing, Smith's anthology is a veritable landscape of America mythology, mysticism, and dreams. Compiled between 1927 and 1932, released initially in 1952 and re-released in 1997, the anthology contains 84 tracks, divided into three volumes of ballads, social songs, and songs. I'm sure it'll take me a lifetime to fully digest this, probably longer to ever grasp the meaning and life behind every recording, but like Zinn's "People's History," this musical Genesis is indispensable in understanding the blood, dreams, and heart break America was born of.

**Also in the mix:** The Pogues: Red Roses for Me, The Beltones: Cheap Trinkets, The Hives: Veni, Vidi, Vicious, Bell Hooks: All About Love—New Visions, Da Capo Best of Music Writing 2001, Iggy and the Stooges: Raw Power.

this sound has been copied a thousand fold. Where do we go from here? I guess we'll all have to keep our ears open and watch it unfold before our eyes. (GBS)

Initial Records PO Box 17131 Louisville, Kentucky 40217 [www.initialrecords.com](http://www.initialrecords.com)

**The Jazz June - The Boom, The Motion and the Music, CD** A re-issue of their long out of print 2nd release from 1998 is now available for your listening enjoyment. Six slow melodic and addicting songs, but if you have heard this band before, you know what I am talking about. Very excellent musicianship which is a little heavier than their first release, but very solid. Good CD. (TK)

PO Box 60 Kutztown, PA 19530

**The Jive Turkeys - sounds from the idiodyssey, CD** The music on this CD is as welcome to my ears as a puss excreting infection. The liner notes are constant praise of the bands "originality" which takes up any space they could have used for lyrics (maybe its better that way). I experimented and listened to the first 5 seconds of the first 5 songs and noticed they never change tempo/drum beat/or chord progressions for that matter. Can you make music any more boring? Oh yeah...maybe I should explain what they attempted to sound like so you aren't all thinking im crazy. I'll let the bands own self-essay do the talking. "Describing a band as picking through the scrap heap of blues, rock and soul is neigh the kiss of death, sounding like a band in a Budweiser commercial or the jam of rhythm and shoeless hippie girls. For some reason, however, the jive turkeys pull it off" Reviewer's note: No they do not.

Deraileur Records PO Box 10276 Columbus, OH 43201

**KaitO - You've seen us...you must have seen us..., CD** Sugar-coated, chirpy female vocals dipped occasionally in random flavors of distortion. Musically, KaitO is getting kissy-face with Sonic Youth. This honeyed hullabaloo will leave you sticky fingered. (JG)

Devil in the Woods- PO Box 579168 Modesto, CA 95357

**Kill Sadie - Experiments in Expectation, CD** For not being my cup of tea, their music is actually pretty good. Kind of like At The Drive-In, but with more abstract rhythm. The instruments sound like they are being bludgeoned to death. They must be pet- named 'Sadie'. (JG)

Dim Mak PO Box 14041 Santa Barbara, CA 93107

**Knut - S/T, CD** Evil and scary pissed off metal-core that scared my cat off of the stereo speaker she likes to sleep on. The mid-tempo groove suits this band very well. (BC)

Hydra Head Records PO Box 990248 Boston, MA 02199

**The Lack - S/T, CD** This is too easy. They "lack" any type of cohesiveness, rhythm, harmony, or melody. Industrial/garbled noise with the seductiveness of static. Monotonous and apathetic at times, it takes too long to achieve an emotion. My favorite track is #8, a 1:48 intermis-

sion completely silent except for an inaudible growl...or was it a fart?  
Cause this stinks-BWAH-HA! (JG)

Troubleman Unlimited, 16 Willow St. Bayonne, NJ 07002

**The Ladderback - Introductions to Departure, CD** The Raleigh trio that sounds sort of like an indie rock band that keeps exploding. Intense and driven, like the soundtrack to a disaster movie. Slick production except for the one track that sounds like the tape recorder was in some guy's pants, which is one of the most melodic and soulful. The CD actually gets more harmonic as it goes on, with the band even employing a string section. They manage to keep up the speed and the immediacy, though. Makes me want to watch NASCAR or the History Channel or something. (DAL)

Bifocal Media, PO Box 50106, Raleigh, NC 27650-0106

**The Lawrence Arms - Apathy and Exhaustion, CD** One of Chi-Town's hottest bands right now. Not as generic as most releases on Fat seem to be. This band is super melodic and one singer has scratchy vocals while the other is a little plain but not boring stuff at all. (BC)

Fat Wreck Chords PO Box 193690 San Fran, CA. 94119-3690

**9 Lesser of Two - Transmutation, CD** A compilation of earlier works from this Oakland CA based band, as well as some new and unreleased stuff. Some of the older works date back to their first seven-inch recorded in 1991. It is always fun to see how a band progressed over a decade of playing music together. This band did a lot of it, including a couple break-ups and a tour of Europe which is written about on their web site. They definitely sound like they are from the Bay Area. Their older recordings sound like old Neurosis or Econochrist. The newer songs on the CD consist of tight fast hardcore, with morbidly creepy samples introducing the songs. This CD fucking rocks. (TK)

PO Box 3603 Oakland, CA 94609

**Limp - no title, CD** Well produced alternative pop rock with an occasional punk flavoring. It's all fun and good but at times I looked and laughed at their ironic name. (AS)

Honest Don's, PO Box 192027, San Francisco, CA 94119-2027

**Lonely Kings - Crowning Glory, CD** Thirteen power rock hits from this California punk trio. The best stuff I got to review this time around by far! (BC)

Fearless Records 13772 Golden West 545 Westminster, CA 92683

**Love Junk - Tribulations, CD** It's Music like this that puts a smile on my face. Really catchy pop punk similar to early Jawbreaker, but faster. Scruff Myers sounds much like Guy Lyons from the Figgs with vocals and musicianship. Playing together since 1990, they have definitely developed a sound they should stick with. I also dig the guitar solos spattered throughout the CD. Simple and well placed. This release

## REVIEWER SPOTLIGHT: Jason Gitzlaff (JG)

WILD KINGDOM—THE GONDWANILAND BAND Back in the 80's to early 90's one band ruled the funky kingdom of Milwaukee, WI. Every show sold out...and every show was unforgettable. With crowns of bones they would make their way through the crowd to the stage amidst the battle cry "WILD IS THE KINGDOM...THE KINGDOM IS WILD!". Lead vocalist Paul Finger would then methodically begin the festivity by breathing fire into the audience and the fucking mayhem would commence. Belting out self-described "skaterumpadelic" tunes like "Squiggy Bone", "We Like to Play in the Junkyard", and "Jump, Stomp, & Dive", Wild Kingdom had the sing along anthems that put the kids literally through the roof. Combining elements of punk, funk, and ska (to name a few) with frequent cannon bursts of French ticklers, Lucky Charms, or an entire vat of mashed potatoes (depending on the corresponding holiday, be it Bastille Days, St. Patrick's Day, or Thanksgiving.) to name a few. Wild Kingdom helped celebrate every occasion. This band single-handedly created my passion for underground music. As a young teenager, there was nothing more important than an upcoming WK show. Forget girlfriends...WK were our loyal weekend dates. The saddest part of the story, besides their demise, is that none of it was ever released. C'mon Paul....your loyal following will forever be waiting.

REMAINING CONSTANT motherfucking Andrew W.K., Rise Against, Killcreek, Lovage, Tomahawk, Lawrence Arms, Goodbye Harry, McRad, Silent Majority, Frank Miller's DK2...and the entire GO-KART RECORDS CATALOG!!!

even has a token pop-punk cover song. This time its Jenny (8675309) These guys should get popular so they can afford to play in the U.S.A.! If you are reading this, Reprise: don't hold back. Give a good band some money. (TK)

Crackle, PO Box 7, Otley, LS21 1VB, England

**Mariner - Hurry Up and Wait, CD** From Providence, home of many great streetpunk bands and friendly people, comes this drab take it easy art-rock band that's surprisingly non-dense sounding despite the numerous instruments and synthesizer sounds involved. (AE)  
Arbeid, 616 Willett Ave, Riverside, RI 02915

**Maya Shore - Farewell to Introductions, CD** Relaxing and wonderful are the two words I would chose to describe this album. Low key and soft guitars combined with the basic rhythm section, with additions of keyboards and a cello in some of the songs. 8 songs, sounding somewhat similar, but yet holding on to an original sound. Nice and relaxing. (TK)  
The Music Fellowship PO Box 9325 New Haven, CT 06533-0325

**Merzbow - Dharma, CD** Four songs of experimental noise. Most people would say that it isn't music, but I liken it to standing behind a jet engine for fifty minutes. It damages. Again, label hinders band by not providing full artwork. (AS)  
Hydra Head Records, P.O. Box 990248, Boston, MA 02199

**Midvale School For The Gifted – Our 1999-2000 Science Fair Project, CD** Cross the Flash Gordon soundtrack with Trans Am and Victims Family and it might sound like this. I don't understand if this CD is a joke or what. I think these guys would be more suited at Widney High instead. (NS)  
edfurniture.com

**¶ Misery/Extinction of Mankind - Apocalyptic Crust, CD** Because of my roommates, I have heard this record just under 10,000 times, so it would be quite easy to say that if you are into crust punk on any level, this recording deserves a listen. Both bands are fairly well known, so I'll spare you the poor explanation or anycomparisons. There are some confusing things regarding the layout (which was kindly pointed out by my fine roommates). Misery plays the odd number songs and Extinction of Mankind; the even numbers. Also, for all you punkers who already own the record and make fun of those of us who have a CD collection as well as a vinyl collection, there is an extra song on the CD version, so ha. (TK)

Crimes Against Humanity c/o Nick Carroll 6200 78th Ave. N Apt#112 Brooklyn Park, MN 55443

**Mofa - ST, CD** It sounds like the early 90's post hardcore/emo sound is just hitting Argentina. This is a throwback to the days of Temperance,

Godspeed, Serpico, Stone Telling or One. Except these guys sing in Spanish and they have much more suave facial hair. This might be a few years too late, but it's well played and nice to hear if you liked bands like those above. (NS)  
Sniffing Recording Industries, CC 3288 (1000) Buenos Aires, Argentina

**The Monroes - S/T, 7"** Great rocker/rockabilly treasure of a single with three original tracks. The recording itself is strong, the vocals up front and the drive of the drums and bass are striking. One of the best sounding singles I have heard in along time. (EA)  
Speed Nebraska Records PO Box 3103 Omaha, Nebraska 68103

**Montana Pete - Devo, 7"** Noise indeed, Gang of Four would be proud of this sound. I had zero expectations with this single and only gave it a good listen due to the title track's name. No, it isn't a Devo medley or cover as I hoped, but rather a quiet, then loud, then quiet song that gets the white man's head bobbing for sure. Side two "French Ladies" follows said format without ever really getting to the loud part. It is almost like, "damn it get to the part where you go apeshit" and yet they never do, that is genius. (EA)  
Coin-Operated Records PO Box 24356 Tooting, London SW17 9FE

**Moviola - Rumors of the Faithful, CD** Goes down like an easy listening version of Credence Clearwater Revival, or maybe a Beach Boys Reunion tour. This is maybe geared toward and older hippie type crowd. It really wasn't my thing. (TK)  
Spirit of Orr records PO Box 381869, Cambridge MA 02238

**¶ Nakatomi Plaza - Private Property, CD** New York band Nakatomi Plaza combines hardcore, pop, and indie rock into a very catchy mix. This cd is their third release. Some of the members are involved with a band from the same location called DeLaHoya, whom I enjoy very much. I was actually reminded of verystrange comparisons when listening, including guitar riffs that sound as if they could befrom a Fifteen song, and a riff straight out of a Def Leopard song. Fortunately for them,their drummer is much more capable. This band travels a lot. I actually just missed them at the Fireside last month, which is a bit upsetting. I'm sure they will be coming to a town near you soon, and I suggest you check them out. Oh, and buy their CD. (TK)  
Gunboat Records apt 2L; 147 Colombia ST Cambridge, MA 02140

**The Necks - Hanging Gardens, CD** One 60 minute and 30 second long track that does absolutely nothing for me. I'd rather listen to the electronic ambiance of my toaster. (JG)  
www.thenecks.com

**Nice and Easy - Sold Out, CD** Great sing-a-long band. Street Punk from the UK that sounds reminiscent of The Jam. At the end of the thank-you section of the booklet there is a small blurb about how the album

## REVIEWER SPOTLIGHT: Neal Shah (NS)

I know everyone says that today's hardcore scene is better than ever, but once again I must play the fuddy duddy card and say HOGWASH! Actually, you can have your hardcore scene. But what about the Splattercore scene? Who will keep the splatter fire burning? Which brings us to the best (and maybe only) splatter core band, THE ACCUSED. Like a lot of bands during the 80's, they grew out of a punk band (The Fartz), had a great period, and then succumbed (sea cucumber?) to bad metal. Maybe people would argue that "Martha Splatterhead's Maddest Stories Ever Told" was a metal album, but as I sit here farting dust, I believe that this was their best and last thrash album. Nowadays, most grindcore bands sing in some throat warbling manner, but back when these guys were good, few singers sounded this maniacal. No one has ever had a voice that replicated Blaine's insane cackling. He almost sounded like a deaf person trying to sing. The first song, Psychomania, starts shit off. The bass thumps, the guitars start chugging, then the Blaine's voice kicks in and shit gets haywire from there. You can't understand the words, you can't keep up with the time changes and it's awesome. I still get chills when I listen to the song Scared Of The Dark, as it alternates between balls out thrash and that girl's eerie singing. Their awesome cover of Lights Out introduced me to another great band, the Angry Samoans. The album finishes off with their creepy rendition of the childhood favorite, The Hearse Song. I was a little disappointed when I heard that the Fartz reformed, rather than the Accused. It seems like a step backwards. I think this is the only Accused album that is still available, so I suggest picking it up and finding out what a punk band can do with some actual talent and creativity. Even if it means not being quite punk.

**Ooohhwee:** Dinosaur Jr., Lemonheads, The Stupids, No Mercy, Beowulf, Corrupted Morals, 76% Uncertain, Articles of Faith – Adult Swim on TV – Track and Field and Ms. Pac-Man at the arcade – perverted cartoons with Mario Paint

was dedicated to all who have the vision that street punk can be more than clichés. Although I liked this music a lot, lyrics from the 11th track on the CD : "I don't want you to tell me what you believe. I don't believe in hypocrites, don't care what you've seen. Practice what you preach or don't talk to me." really seems to sum up what I thought of the lyrics. Although I didn't read one lyric about drinking or football? (TK)  
DSS Records PO Box 739 4021 Linz Austria

**Noothgrush – Failing Early, Failing Often, CD** This CD is a collection of Noothgrush tracks that have appeared on 7" singles, split releases, and compilations. Hailing from the East Bay, Noothgrush have always managed to keep my attention, while others in the same genre have bored me to tears. With a sludginess that is reminiscent of Sleep, it is not uncommon for Noothgrush to pull out some long hefty tunes that can fill in the seven-minute range. Noothgrush broke up last year, and while this release documents their early years, another CD is in the works that will contain all their later recordings. (SY)  
Slap A Ham, PO Box 7337, Alhambra, CA 91802-7337

**The Now - S/T, CD** This is a great looking CD. The top notch graphic design is innovative and thoroughly cool. Too bad the music is crudgy. Heavy metallish ejaculations with angry screeching. All that throat pain, and for what. Was it really worth it, man? (DAL)  
Robodog Records, 12001 Aintree Lane, Reston, VA 20191

**The Numbers – Letters, 7"** European cock-rock with maybe some Black Flag brought in at times. If this sounds like your cup 'o' tea then you will love this. It is loud, it is guitar driven, and it has three songs from Germany song in English. (EA)  
Stereodrive Records Von-Steuben Str.17, 48143 Muenster, Germany

**Numbskull - The Great Brain Bake-Off, CD** Formed in 1984 with a 10 year hiatus in the 90's, This band has been putting out music since I was 5, and I have never heard of them. Funny lyrics with No Means No style music with samples of voices before each of the songs. They have a very garage sound to the recording in which they use turntables and different synth sounds throughout to create a noise aspect to their music. Heavy Metal Gods is my favorite track, where the band describes why they are not heavy metal gods. Pick it up if you like sloppy rock and roll with a heavier edge. (TK)

Smog Veil Records/774 Mays #10-454 Incline Village, NV 89451 USA

**Officer May – Helping Others Help Themselves, CD** This is probably my pick of the issue and they didn't even include an address! One of those

bands who showcase all of the musicians separately at times, but then come together to produce something more cohesive and rockin'. The bass is bouncy, the drums have a lot of high hat and the guitar is disjointed like a mother-for-ya! More frenetic than Fugazi, but more straight forward than Jesus Lizard. Maybe a little Archers of Loaf weirdness? The singer sounds like Kurt Cobain at times. How's this for a comparison: Clawhammer. Who remembers them? I'm trying to think of as many relevant bands as I can because I can't come up with the rock journalist words to properly describe this. And since I don't usually like stuff like this, how am I going to sell it to you? If this helps, I think my roommate will really like this. That means a lot because he's the most finicky bitch ever. He doesn't like spaghetti sauce for gosh sakes! (NS) no address

**Operation Makeout - First Base, CD** The resemblance to Sleater-Kinney isn't just a passing thing, this trio is a virtual soundalike. The singer's voice is a lot like Corine Tucker's, so it's not unfounded, although the way she makes her voice vibrate goes a bit too far in the mimicry. The instrumentation is similar as well, same type of stripped down interweaving guitar work. I think they pull it off and this EP is solid, but they're so S-Kesque that they're going to have some trouble finding their own niche as a band unless they branch out. The male bassist-vocalist is one divergent twist, and when they do back and forth or duets the band achieves a nice intensity, although sometimes when he shouts it doesn't sound very sincere. Nitpicking aside, I like this record. One last nitpick, though: I'm sorry, but the tongue-locking and licking photos on the cover and back sleeve, while punk and everything, are pretty gross. (DAL)

Mint Records, Inc., PO Box 3613, Vancouver, BC Canada V6B 3Y6

**The Paper Hearts - S/T, CDEP** Soft-spoken male/female vocals combined with honkytonk/folk rock. This is dainty music, that makes me think of the counting crows...and now I'm counting the chunks in my vomit. (JG)  
Clunk Records www.geocities.com/thepaperhearts

**The Piranhas – S/T, 7"** It is now official that the keyboard is back, I have proclaimed that too many of today's best bands are using this machine to create great music. The trick is that it isn't in a Depeche Mode way, but an organ blasting way ala' great rockers in the past from the Lyres to Devo. The Piranhas come from the most unlikely of places Walled Lake, MI. This is good, real good, in fact I almost want to say, "Move over Briefs there is some competition." (EA)

Rocknroll Blitzkrieg PO Box 11906 Berkeley, CA 94712

**REVIEWER SPOTLIGHT:** Scott Yahtzee (SY)

While I can trace my metal roots back to listening faithfully to Iron Maiden in the fourth grade, the band that allowed me to fully accept the merge between 90's hardcore and metal was Rorschach. With the cover art catching my curiosity, I picked up the "Protestant" LP and was floored. They hearted the doominess of Black Flag's "My War" era and played it with the speed of early 80's thrash. Throw in Charles Maggio's burnt throat vocals and you have a sound that still can't be duplicated. I got to see Rorschach once and consider myself lucky. You can pick up the "Autopsy" discography CD on Gern Blandsten and I obviously recommend that you do so.

And while we are talking metal, that is all I have been listening to! The good stuff? Marduk's "Panzer Division," Ablaze My Sorrow's "If Emotion Still Burns," Witchery "Restless & Dead," Opeth's "Still Life," and the new Darkest Hour "So Sedated So Secure."

**Providence Union – Die Me Infinity + 4, CD** Emo of the forgettable kind. The vocals don't stand out enough, and neither does the catchiness. I definitely like the heavier parts of the songs (the bass at times is SPE-LUNKING!), more than the morphine-laced ones. (JG)

Stick Figure Records, PO Box 55462 Atlanta, GA30308

**Quick Fix - Novel Weapons, CD** This silly new school hardcore plays like a better band's side project. The singer sounds like he's making fun of himself and over enunciates everything. (AE)

Ernest Jenning Record Company, 906 Summit Ave., Jersey City, NJ 07307

**Reaching Forward – Burning The Lies, CD** Man, how does Reflections have time to put out records? If I lived in Arnhem, I'd spend all my time at the monkey park. They have all kinds of monkeys, and a lot of them aren't even in cages, so they can jump on you and stuff. It's awesome! You have to get a "monkey purse" to put your stuff in so the monkeys don't take stuff out of your pockets. If I had this generic Dutch Chain of Strength rip off CD though, I'd let the monkeys take it and fling it like poo. (NS)

Reflections, Spoorwegstraat 117, 6828 AP, Arnhem, The Netherlands

**Remains of the Day - An Underlying Frequency, CD** Whoa...dark hardcore with bone-crunching riffs, screams, violins, and screams. The vocals actually make me wince because it sounds like his anus is tearing. In fact, picturing his asshole blowing out while listening to this is making me giggle. Stop laughing...this is serious shit. (JG)

Crimes Against Humanity 6200 78<sup>th</sup> Ave. N #112 Brooklyn Park, MN 55443

**Remembering Never – Suffocates My Words To You, CD** Like In Dying Days, these guys are very competent at playing metallic hardcore. They go in a more Converge-ish chug chug direction though and the vocals sound almost alterna-metal at times, like something you'd hear on the "New Rock" station. Not bad, but I like my metal like I like my women, late 80's! (NS)

Onedaysaviour Records, PO Box 372, Williston Park, NY 11596

**9 Restos Fosiles – Sonidos, CDEP** Indie Rock en Espaniol. I am not bilingual, and that is really too bad in this case. I really wanted to learn something about this band's history so I can be as informative in this review as possible. I searched on Goggle for Restos Fosiles, and used the built in Google web site translator. I really hope this is the same band I found a description for. Apparently they used to be a youth-crew type hardcore band. They changed their style quite a bit since then if that was the case. The CD only has 5 songs on it. Poppy indie rock, who a few years ago did a split 7" with J-church. Their styles are very similar in some ways. If I am ever in South America, I'm going to check this band out. (TK)

No Fun Records cc (1909) c1000wat Buenos Aires, Argentina

**9 Riff Randells – How 'Bout Romance, 7"** Not often do singles make for long reviews, but this Riff Randells is their best single to date. These girls have come a long way worth many different sounds. Let's hope they settled in on this straight forward rockin' sound that is equal parts bub-

blegum pop and Joan Jett/Runaways. The A-side is a teen malt shop treasure that any fan of the Bobbyteens would love. "How 'Bout Romance?" is an anthem of girls everywhere and asks the question that with Joey Ramone gone, who will teach teenage boys that a slow romantic song ala "I Wanna Be Your Boyfriend" can be cool, macho, and dare we say romantic. The B-side starts with "M.O." a mid-tempo rocker that makes me think of the Donnas if they hadn't heard any metal music in their influential years. The other half of the flipside has a great cover of the Nikki & the Corvettes track "Girls Like Me." I don't think it is easy to mess up any Nikki songs, in fact this is a great version that is worth your lunch money. The Riff Randells have sure adopted the Lipstick records sound and this is the seventh single by a label that may go down in history as one of the best kept secrets in rock 'n' roll. (EA) Lip Stick Records 1154 Powell Street, Oakland, CA 94608

**Rollo Tomasi – He Who Holds You, CD** This is the first CD I have ever reviewed for Punk Planet that came with one of those bar coded sticker seals on the case. Call the punk rock police. This trio churns out tunes slow, plodding tunes that never really take off. There's a pervasive boredom to their delivery. I think I put more energy into removing the plastic seal than they put into recording this. (DAL)

Divot Records, PO Box 14061, Chicago, IL 60614-0061

**Rubens Accomplice - I Blame the Scenery, CD** This band moved me in a way that only it could. It and maybe drinking the last few sips of a 40 and realizing I drank an entire packs worth of cigarette butts and ash. Very cookie-cutter indie rock. It angered me and made me nauseous. (TK) Better Looking Records 11041 Santa Monica Blvd, PMB 302 Los Angeles, CA 900025-3525

**Ruheda - Ruheda, CD** God, no more of this fucking shit. What the fuck is with this terrible black metal-core phenomenon? Is this the backlash to pop punk's popularity? And why does it seem to mostly come from the east coast? fuck man, no, No, NO, NO! (GBS)

Level Plane PO Box 280 NYC NY 10276 www.level-plane.com

**9 San Geronimo - 5 Track EP, CD** This is limited to 500 copies, is a UK-only release, and features members of popular bands. San Geronimo, or "SG" as they like to be abbreviated, play quality Bay Area rock with more Midwest post-punk influences than CA pop-punk influences. There's a Larry Damore mope to the vocals, but it's set to thick dreamy guitars that smell of the "we've been in bands before and are all grown up now— look what we can do" syndrome. It's of no surprise that this band features ex-members of Lifetime, Jets To Brazil, and Drowningman. I wouldn't say this sounds like any of those bands, but more like what you'd expect people with that degree of musicianship to grow into. The songs are too long and feature somewhat unnatural changes that would work better as separate, shorter songs. The song length adds to the type of intensity these guys are going for, though. I won't lose any sleep if I never hear this band again, but this is a likeable effort nonetheless. I think they also have at least one full-length

## REVIEWER SPOTLIGHT: Timmy (TK)

I am in love with Morpheus. For those of you who don't know what the hell I'm talking about, it is a program much like napster which hasn't yet been raped by the corporate media, the "music industry", and that stupid fucking drummer from Metallica. Not yet anyway. I suggest anyone with a somewhat fast connection to the internet get a hold of this program. The reason I began with this is because I would only have 8 songs from my favorite band of the last few months. Morpheus afforded me the opportunity to listen to an additional 18 songs that have been out of print for some time now. The band: YOU AND I. I don't really have a gauge to see how popular these guys were a few years ago when they were around. From what I have read about them, they are legendary. I do know they are from New Jersey, and they play some of the best "post-hardcore" or "screamo" (or whatever you want to call it) that has ever been released. The music is very technical. They have a heavily riff oriented style that finds itself somewhere between melodic metal and classical guitar. Their songs seem like they could be 4 or 5 separate songs, that get seamlessly combined into a mix of chaos and beauty. Through reading about this band I see that they are quite underrated. Even Davey Havok from AFI says these guys are just an "emo band" in an interview I read. I only wish I had heard of this band before their break-up in 1999. To my knowledge, everything that they had put out is currently out of print, <http://www.insound.com> has a video and a re-release of their first 7" on back order. I know this because I have been waiting for a month now, and it still hasn't been placed on my doorstep. Before their end, they released 1 7", 2 LPs which I hope will someday be re-released, and a video of their last show. Members of You and I are currently playing in "The Assistant" (fucking excellent live shows and music along the same vein as You and I, but more chaotic/melodic) and "Neil Perry", whom I haven't heard much of anything, but sound good from what I have listened to. This band has been a constant in my life since the purchase of "The Curtain Falls" from Level-Plane records a year ago, which was their final studio recording. If you have a chance to give this band a listen, by all means take advantage of it.

**What I am listening to now:** You and I, The Faint, The Assistant, Fantomas, Sonic Youth, The Pharcyde, No Rest For the Dead, Christie Front Drive, The Replacements, The Modern Machines (order their tape from New Disorder!), The Comsomol Diaries, Turbonegro.

already, so this isn't just a one-shot deal. (AE)

Ignition Records, PO Box 333, Margate, Kent, CT9 2FY, UK

**Satellite Grooves/ ManMatesMachine/ the SpaceWurm - Split, CD** A handful of electronic tracks from each of the bands. SG are quiet mechanical whispers, MMM is a little more upbeat and funky (clunky), and SW are more strange with sweeping backward beats. Nothing giving me a boner here. (JG)

No info given.

**The School Uniforms - Some Oxbow, CD** This is true lightweight pop here, with folk guitar and other backings like a drum machine and glockenspiel. There's an energy to it that explains to me why this would be sent to this here magazine despite nothing punk on the surface. A one-man band named Harrison, this is a less jokey Atom and His Package. The songs have playful childish lyrics about friendship, severed heads, and life past high school. There's no underlying principle that's identifiable amongst the anecdotal tales of feeling this way or that, other than an earnest attempt at self-reflection and questioning of others' quirks. There are slight moments when the drum machine "kicks in," taking the tempos a bit faster than normal for this sort of folksy rock and that's a welcome aspect of this. Hailing from Grand Junction, this Harrison guy is a talented motherfucker who has now taken off for Brazil for two years. So maybe he'll amuse a whole new audience over there with this enchanting pop magic before returning to the U.S. West. His fans in Columbine country will be waiting, I'm sure. Such talent! (AE)

URU, Svedeliusvag 16 II, S-611 36 Nykoping, SWEDEN

**Scorefor - Leaving The Birdcage, CD** Tight, energetic melodic pop punk that stands right along with the multitudes of other good bands doing this style. If you're into it, it's worth it. (AS)

Wolverine Records, KaiserwertherStr. 166, 40474 Dusseldorf, Germany

**Serotonin - Early Works, CD** This increasingly popular emo band from TN here re-releases its first LP and 7". The vocalist is exceptional and has as good a slow screaming emo voice as anyone. They're worthy of the attention they've been getting, I'd say. (AE)

Sanjam, 9 rue des mesanges, 35650 LeRheu, FRANCE

**Seven Story - Dividing by Zero, CD** Very interesting light music here with a sound heavy on the instrumental side but it does have vocals. But we all know you can't divide by zero because you get zero every time. (BC) Deep Elm Records PO Box 36939 Charlotte, NC 28236

**Sir Millard Mulch - The De-Evolution of Yasmine Bleeth, CDEP** Annoying synth pop with silly vocals. Just when it starts being catchy, it annoys more. Reading the booklet, apparently my reaction to listening to his music isn't far from what was intended when written. (TK)

EDFURNITURE.com

**Slick Pig - Bottled Distortion, CD** I'm not sure what Slick Pig were trying to accomplish but it came out as an emo, screamo, metal, gothic sludgefest. I give 'em props for doing something different both musically and sonically. When in doubt, push it. (AS)

[www.slickpig.cjb.net](http://www.slickpig.cjb.net)

**Sorry About Dresden - The Convenience of Indecision, CD** I believe this marks the 5th or 6th CD from Sorry About Dresden. Great music to listen to when you are sad/want to be sad. Vocalist Matt Oberst is Conor Oberst's brother. Conor Oberst is Bright Eyes. Very similar in some aspects, and completely different in others. Both bands have a very unhappy sound to them, but Sorry About Dresden mixes a bit of punk with their emo. I guess I'm not really in the mood to be sad right now, or I would be really enjoying this album. (TK)

Saddle Creek Records PO Box 8554 Omaha, NE 68108

**Spaceboy - The Force That Holds Together a Heart Torn to Pieces, CD** Featuring Clifford Dinsmore and Bill Torgerson from Bl'ast! and Adam Cantwell from The Fucking Champs, I am told this is Spaceboy's second record. More melodic and musically accomplished than your average grindcore band. I have to say Spaceboy does stick out of the pack of usual thrash and grindcore. But fuck it, I can't stand this sort of noise anyway. (GBS)

TRASHart! [sound and culture] PO Box 725 Providence, RI 02901 [www.soundandculture.com](http://www.soundandculture.com)

**Spazz - Sweatin' Vol. 3, CD** The masters of short songs are back, with 67 songs taken from split singles, compilations, and a 5" record released from 1995-1998. These are the masters of grind core and if you are a

CD only person get all three volumes and you are set to go. No other band takes gore, pop culture, sarcasm, and wrap it into a minute or less well pounding away so diligently. I wonder how many songs that Dodge can list with the number of songs this band has recorded going into the hundreds. Plus with songs like, "A Prayer for the Complete and Utter Eradication Of All Generic Pop-Punk" who can go wrong. (EA) Slap A Ham PO Box 7337 Alhambra, CA 91082-7337

**The Spicy Rizzaks - Is There a Duck in Here?, CD** Resplendently dumb bar rock from a group of dorks who've listened to a lot of early NY punk records and have watched a lot of bad TV in their day. I haven't heard a song as dumb as "Nerd" in a while. There's no lyric sheet, but I think they're saying "do our homework, give us your lunch money, you goddamn nerd." And that's probably the deepest lyric on the thing! This EP will have you scratching your head and ass simultaneously— what the hell do these silly men think they're doing and why am I liking it? This is SILLY SILLY SILLY SILLY stuff. But it's played well and it's fun if you can stand it. I wonder who they play to, because most people young enough to appreciate it surely can't get in at the types of establishments they must be playing. They're goofy in a decidedly non-intelligent all-out stupid way that will turn off most thinking people. But for the rest of us, this is a dishonorably good time. So when you're in the NY area and want to see a dumb rock band on a Wednesday night at a random bar, these guys will probably be ready and waiting. (AE)

Bwatt! Records, 97 Clinton Street Suite #1b, New York, NY 10002

**Strobe Talbot - 20 Pop Songs, CD** Jad Fair (Half Japanese and a number of solo projects), Mike Hobbs, and Ben Gallaher play 20 pop songs under the guise of everyone's favorite former Deputy Secretary Of State. Not nearly as good as Half Japanese, but same idea. (TK)

Alternative Tentacles Records PO Box 419092 San Francisco, CA 94141-9092

**Suicide Note - Come on Save Me, CD** The first song on this CD is pretty impressive. Complex metal and screaming along the same vein as Cave In. There are some really cool impressive riffs in the first couple of songs that make me think positive things about this band and its talented musicians. Then I listen to the rest of the CD, which seems to get less impressive. If you like to hear a barrage of metal riffs, and you think you might like a mix between old and new Cave-In type sound, give it a shot. It's not really rockin' enough for me, though.

Hawthorne Street Records PO Box 805353 Chicago, IL 60680

**Swoon Doll - Sigh, CD** Boring and very repetitive ambience. I tried to listen to it. It just keeps repeating the same damn noises over and over. Recommendations to enhance listening to this CD would be large amounts of hallucinogenic. (TK)

Red Net Records 608 O'Farrell St, #62 San Francisco, CA 94109

**Sybarite - Placement Issues, CD** Dreamy dance music that sometimes has a jazz feel to it. Like something you would hear in a music appreciation class at your local junior college. (BC)

www.meusic.net

**Tarantula Hawk - Tarantula Hawk, CD** Spooky dookie goth stuff. I must say my respect for this band went up a notch when I pressed the skip track to go to the second tune, only to find this record is *only one song!* More than thirty minutes of nonstop goth madness!! The beats have this weird tribal feel, at times reminiscent of Soulfly, but more cannibal background music a la a B-Movie film—That's what this is, B-Movie Goth soundtrack. I'm not sure whose advantage this is to, but there are no vocals either. (GBS)

Life is Abuse PO Box 20524 Oakland, CA 94620

**Technician - Opposition, CD** Produced by Steve Albini; real low, deep, and grungy. Think a more mellow and melodic minute men (is that possi-

ble?), or later Mike Watt solo material. It's always cool though when the bass takes the spotlight instead of the guitar. I don't know if it's because of Albini, but I can't shake the slow Nirvana vibe this record has got. (GBS) Tranquility Base PO Box 84, PA 19010

**There Were Wires - S/T, CD** The first full length from this 5 piece band from Beverly, MA is pretty straight forward. All the members are straight edge, but this is not near generic sXe hardcore in style. Their sound is a concoction of melodic screamo and pounding hardcore with a lot of unpredictable stop/start. I enjoyed the lyrics almost as much as I liked the music. Even the layout is impressive, comprised of a booklet which not only gives the lyrics, but also written essays by the members who wrote the lyrics. Only 1000 of these babies were put into circulation, so if this sounds like the kind of tunes you would be into, pick this up while you can. Oh, and they have a cool web site. (TK) Modern Day Detachment 585 Washington ST Apt 3 Brighton, MA 02135

**Tijuana Crime Scene - Change of Venue, CD** Melodic indie rock, Tijuana Crime Scene sounds hauntingly like Wilco. Introspective lyrics coupled with straight forward songwriting and sparse piano (or organ) arrangements. Uncomplicated but at times boring. (GBS) Arise Records 7 PO Box 45 Shelbyville, Kentucky 40066 www.ariserecords.com

**Today Is The Day/16 - Split CD** 3 songs from 16, who play gritty, Helmet-esque rock, and 2 from Today Is The Day, who play odd, grooving hardcore/metal. These two bands seem to resemble stoner rock more and more these days. You probably know what to expect with these bands, but I always thought 16 should get more respect. Maybe people thing they're a 15 cover band. (NS) Trash Art!, PO Box 725, Providence, RI 02901

**Toxic Reasons - Independence, CD** Along with Negative Approach and the Necros, Toxic Reasons contributed much to define the Midwest hardcore sound of the early 80's. "Independence" was released in 1982, with Toxic Reasons taking influences from U.K. punk, and kicking it up a notch in speed and rage. To my knowledge, no digital remastering has touched the recording, and this reissue is faithful to the original while also containing additional artwork and photographs. (SY) Beer City Records, PO Box 26035, Milwaukee, WI 53226-0035

**Trapped in Life - S/T, CD** "You, lie within, death corpse melted with pieces of flesh/ Free from worms that keep on trying to get to your brain/ Try to escape from that state but it comes too fast/ You feel the world way too deep." Well, with lyrics like that, you know what you're in for. Think Headbanger's Ball. Think Ozzie Osbourne but without a comically endearing persona and a stable of guitar virtuosos on back up. Think metal. (DAL)

Final Beat Down Records, www.finalbeatdown.com

**Tristan Da Cunha - Magnolia/ Knockout Fly 7"** Geeky-funk-punk. Dude, the backup singer sounds straight outta Supernova. If these guys were playing in your house they would be knocking all kinds of shit over. Weird and enjoyable. (JG) www.slendermusic.com/tristan

**United Space - Winter Holiday, CD** There are a couple different vocalists in this dreamy ho-hum indie rock band. At times sounding sincere, at other times sounding awkward and annoying. I'm split, and I can't recommend this on the whole. (JG) unitedspace@mail.com

**Virulent Strain - Torture Tools, CD** Female fronted hardcore/street punk that is the east coast answer to Whorehouse of Representatives. 16 fast angry tracks about the usual. (TK) Rodent Popsicle Records PO Box 1143 Allston, MA 02134

**Vision - just short of living, CD** Eleven songs of fist pumping hard core. New Jersey record labels never let us down when they put out the heavy shit. (BC) Knife or Death Records 805 Adele St. Northfield, NJ 08225

**Wasted - Down and Out, CD** I was wondering when Rancid was going to release a CD that did justice to their s/t 7". After about 10 years, they finally ..... Oh wait. This band has a different name, and are from a different continent altogether. With further investigation, I have found that Rancid and Wasted are indeed two different bands with different musicians from different countries that play identical sounding music. It's uncanny. (TK)

Combat Rock Industry Piennarkatu 26 A 1, 33500 Tampere, Finland

**9 When Sparks Fly - WhyBotherWaiting, CD** I decided to listen to my reviews in alphabetical order this time, and this disc was an unexpected little gem. Pop-punk with that 'band-next-door' appeal. It is very much so an accomplishment in this category of punk when a band has you singing along after only the 2nd or 3rd time listening to the album. Weston or Digger come to mind immediately for comparisons. This is a fucking catchy pop-punk band that you've never heard of. (JG) Confined Records 807 N. Maple St. Eaton, OH 45320

**9 While they Slept - Where?ThereIsNoLifeThere, CD** While They Slept is a fucking amazing band from the Twin Cities that incorporate so many emotions to their music its hard to stay focused. 5 members including two ex-members of Bauer (Milwaukee hardcore) and a very original style. I was a little disappointed when I saw there were 4 songs, but I didn't realize that each of these songs are on average about ten minutes long. They are filled with multiple vocal harmonies, beautifully eerie chord progressions with many layers, changes, and a violin. Their creativeness can possibly be very loosely be compared to Godspeed You Black Emperor with a little added screaming and chaos to the mix. I don't think it is possible to describe the talent of this band efficiently in words. You need to check this band out. (TK)

Spare Change Press P.O. Box 14114 Minneapolis, MN 55414

**9 The White Octave - Menergy, CD** These guys have a fairly large fan-base who were all very disappointed to see that they have very recently called it quits. It's too bad, because I enjoyed this record more than any of the others that I happened to receive last week. I was most excited to see that when doing research of this band on the web, I discovered the site that hosts their page contains media files of Ogg Vorbis, (freeware version of MP3 type file that will always stay free). This made me pretty happy, and all you geeks out there know what i'm saying! Back to the band: This CD is addictive. The tracks make great transitions into each other, each song different and original. I guess if you need some comparisons, I would have to say a bit heavier than Christie Front Drive and Mineral, musically, but with many more complicated rhythms. If my body contained more than two thumbs, rest assured; they would all be pointing upwards. (TK)

Initial Records PO Box 17131 Louisville KY 40217 USA

**9 The Whore Moans - Born to Suck, CD** Like a good nerdy reviewer, I always alphabetize my CD's and 7"'s as I'm doing my reviews. This month's package had me down till I made it near the bottom of the stack and discovered this fine band. The Whore Moans is an excellent mainly female edgy pop band from the middle of nowhere Florida that has already broken up. What the fuck? The one band reviewed this issue that I'd really like to see live is no more. They incorporated a lot of fun gimmicks into their live performances, including face paint. And if they had any more energy live than on this great CD they must've gotten even the sedate headboppers of the new millennium jumping about while they played. I wish this had a lyric sheet with it

because the words, when I can make them out, are really funny. The second song, "Ballad of Kid Rhino," ought to be published as a children's book. The vocals are on the mature end of punk, with the singer having a deep polished female voice that's on the fringes of what's usually expected. And I know it's really fucking sexist to mention this, but they're all incredibly hot as well. But from their un-PC lyrics about sex and love and judging by their name, I somehow doubt I'm offending them with that comment. (AE)

Cephia's Treat Recordings, 3416 W. Lemon St., Tampa, FL 33609

**9 Wiseguy - Pull The Cup, 7"** Rock and rollin' punk from the Netherlands, with rip roarin' solos and songs that are probably about hemis and pulling tubes. They remind me of the Didjits a lot. Or mid tempo Supersuckers stuff. I think I've been appreciating rocking stuff more than fast stuff lately and I'm really feeling this. These guys make me want to overhaul my tranny, put some new cam shafts in and make love to my old lady. Unfortunately I don't have a car or an old lady, so I'll probably just set up a new skateboard and beat off. If Wiseguy have a CD out, I will have to go to the Netherlands and hunt it down. Then I will invite these guys to accompany me to the monkey park. But Reaching Forward can't come! Okay, they can come to. They can hold the monkey purse. (NS) Stardumb, PO Box 21145, 3001 AC Rotterdam, The Netherlands

**Wisenheimer - Untitled, CD** Pretty cool, Queers influenced, but not overly so, punk rock highlighted by generic artwork and lack of address. So good luck finding this bundle of energy. (AS) Rockstar Records.

**Years Apart - Our Kerosene Winter, CD** Full of catchy hooks and sappy lyrics, this CD stayed in the player for a few listening before I hit shuffle again. Comparisons could be somewhere between Lifetime and Samiam. Every song is about love and loss, but if you forget about that aspect, this is a good listen. (TK)

Friction Records PO Box 77715 Greensboro, NC 27412

**9 V/A - 5 Anni Sulla Strada, CD** Thirty songs packed onto two discs of what I assume is a five year celebration of sorts for Riot Records, this comp is fantastic! Running the gamut of punk genres, from dirty proto-punk rock n' roll, post-punk experimental noise, early 80s hardcore, and anthemic pop punk, this comp is chock full of gems. A few covers, (DRI's "Couch Slouch," CCR's "Proud Mary," the folk ballad "You'll Never Walk Alone," and even Cyndi Lauper's "Goonies r' good Enough!!!!) and some great originals like Fine Before You Came's "The Fine Art of Losing Friend," and Stinking Polecats' "Your Babe's in My Head" this is a great comp. Also featuring Genitalz, Derozer, Los Fastidos, and Minnies. Punk sounds really fucking cool in Spanish and Italian. The comp is also dedicated to Carlo Giuliani, fallen comrade from Genoa. (GBS)

Riot Records Viale Monza, 26-20127 Milano, Italy [www.riotrecords.com](http://www.riotrecords.com)

**9 VA - The Big Idea, CD** This is a compilation of Pittsburgh punk bands put together to raise money for the Big Idea cooperative. Right now the Big Idea is a "virtual infoshop" that distributes books, zines, records, and other goodies mostly through tabling at shows, but they hope to open a co-op radical bookstore. Comes with a zine-style booklet, half info on the bands, half info on the Pittsburgh punk scene, which sounds pretty happening. Almost 30 bands are represented, most of the political hardcore variety but some that sound completely different. Standout tracks from Whatever it Takes, The Blissful Idiots, Tabula Rasa, Crucial Unit, Pikadori, and Teddy Duchamp's Army. Lots of good stuff on here, and it's for a worthy cause. (DAL)

Hard Travelin', PO Box 8131, Pittsburgh, PA 15217

**9 V/A - The Brycc House Benefit, CD** The Brycc (brick) house is located in Louisville KY and has been open since April of 2000. Reading

about this facility makes me wish I lived in Kentucky. Very DIY and have amazing facilities, as far as I read about. The music on the cd was very eclectic with a large number of bands/styles of music that seemed to encompass what the Brycc House stands for. Bands included that are noteworthy: De La Hoya, Harem Scarum, Of Asaph, Kung Fu Rick, Chumba Wamba, Cobra Kai, Mike Park, and Noam Chomsky. This is one of the better comps I have heard. Highly recommended, not only due to the excellent selection of unreleased/rare tracks from the bands listed above as well as 17 others, but also for what you would be a part of by supporting this venue. (TK)

The BryccHouse 1055 Bardstown Road, Louisville KY 40204

**V/A - La Consecuencia De Tus Pecado, CD** Mostly a rock and roll comp. Some of the bands included are: The Hookers (obvious misfits wannabes) The Nits, The Retardos, The Millionaires, The Peepshows, and so on. It wasn't something I would listen to all the time, or at all for that matter. The only song I liked was by the Martinets called Sylvia's Mother, which was a story-style song. Everything else is pretty standard. The comp is listed on their website as \$9, which in my opinion would be the equivalent of purchasing a Fat Wreckchords comp for \$20. (TK)

Scooch Pooch records 5850 W 3rd St #209 Los Angeles, CA 90036

**V/A - Firework Anatomy: A 20 Band Compilation, CD** 20-song compilation of primarily strange and sophisticated melodic rock and punk. Bands include Grade, Penfold, San Geronimo, Mock Orange, and Red Animal War. Interesting label, interesting comp. (AE)

Ignition Records, PO Box 333, Margate, Kent, CT9 2FY, UK

**V/A - Friction Records Vol. 1, CD** From emo to indie to hardcore to experimental, the diversity of sounds make this a groovy sampler. Bands like Wrecker, Jameson, North Lincoln, 1984, and the Sewing Terrorists rise to the top. There are 20 tracks, and almost all of them are unreleased. I'm keeping this one. (JG)

Friction Records PO Box 6605 Grand Rapids, MI 49516

**9 V/A - Life & Debt Soundtrack, CD** Anthony B's "Yugguh Yoi, Tugguh Yoi—Nobody want to plant the corn, everybody want to raid di barn"—speaks to the listeners heart and to Jamaica's economic and cultural predicament captured in Stephanie Black's "Life and Debt". Like the films subjects, B's "Raid Di Barn" is caught inbetween worlds-between the tradition of organic beat and the progress of electronic dancehall bounce, spiritual acceptance and contempt for the lingering vestiges of colonialism—all under the burden of the age old question: where can an honest person lay her or his head at the end of day. The musical accompaniment to Black's breathtaking and equally unsettling film "Life and Debt," this collection of songs and artists is more than a reminder of the voices of dissent outside our country or that activism no longer comes in the easy package of marches and speeches. A musical indictment of IMF/WTO policies, this collection of material gathers the frustration, intellect, and anger alive inbetween the breaths of

Jamaican music today, reminding the listener Jamaica and her people are from the easy going "Jah Man" stereotype. Mutabaruka's dirty dancehall joint "Life & Debt" is just as fiery as a speech from the great Mary Harris. The easy sexual rhythm of Ziggy Marley and the Melody Maker's "G7" and Tuff Gong new comers Ghetto Youth can be misleading, warding off those who naively believe reggae's vision of one love excludes struggle. Interspersed with dialogue from Black's film, the soundtrack includes older songs on its roster, like Buju Banton's "Circumstances" and the inevitable Bob Marley tracks. Closing with Peter Tosh's soften spoken plea "Fools Die," this collection of music is the perfect coupling for such a necessarily bold film. (GBS)

Tuff Gong Records 632 Broadway NY, NY 10012

**V/A - Punch Drunk III- TKO Records Compilation, CD** Compilation of bands like U.S. Bombs, Sixer, Antiseen, Electric Frankenstein and more. Of the 26 tracks, more than half are previously unreleased or previously available on vinyl only. (JG)

TKO Records, 4104 24th St. #103, San Francisco, CA 94114

**V/A - Reno: Where Dreams Come to Die, CD** Lots of hardcore stuff here from a city that is very depressing come to think about it. I lost a little bit of money playing the slots there and going to some very nasty strip clubs. (BC)

Sedition Records PO Box 13618 Reno, NV 89507

**V/A - Rock n Roll Hell Yeah, CD** Twenty-seven tracks of worldwide punk, ska, and swing. All decent enough to merit, with special mention to Germany's old timers, The Bullocks. As it says on the inside, they love covers and you get several here including ska/swing like versions of the Sex Pistols and Metallica. (AS)

Wolverine Records, KaiserwertherStr. 166, 40474 Dusseldorf, Germany

**V/A - Songs for Cassavettes, CD** The soundtrack for the indie film of the same name. A great collection of live songs from the likes of The Make Up, Further, Sleater-Kinney, Henry's Dress, Some Velvet Sidewalk, Unwound, Peechees, Bratmobile, Crayon, Tullycraft, Hi-Fives, Dub Narcotic Sound System, Chisel, and Semiautomatic. (EA)

Better Looking Records 11041 Santa Monica BLVD, No. 302 LA, CA 99025

**9 V/A - Stand Up + Fucking Fight For It Queers in Hardcore + Punk, CD** Queer Hardcore never sounded so good! Actually, it sounds lot like any other hardcore, but regardless, this is a great comp. Bands like Ninja Death Squad, The Haggard, Fakelight, Kids Like Us, The V Area, and my personal favorite: Fagatron from Oly with a song called AssKickatron. This is a very eclectic comp covering every style that stems from the Punk and Hardcore scene from indie rock to screaming metal. The last band on the comp (Rotten Fruits) sound like the Sex Pistols even. If you're queer or if you're not, there is something on this comp for every reader of PP. (TK)

Agitprop Records PO Box 748 Hanover, MA 02339



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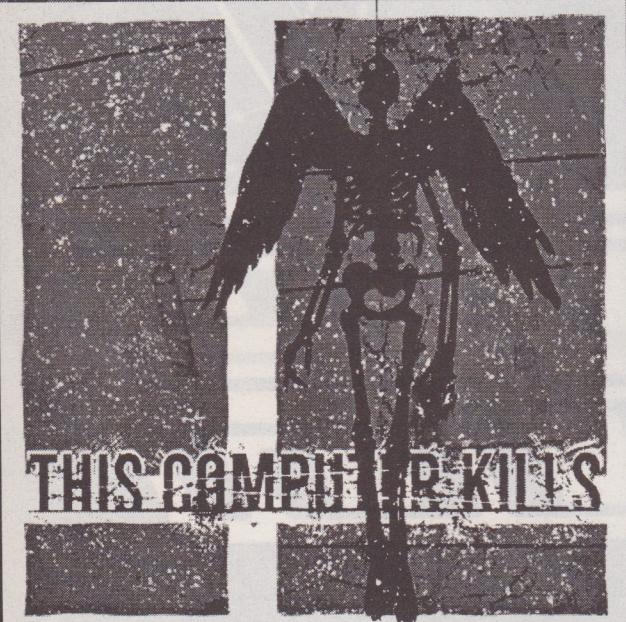
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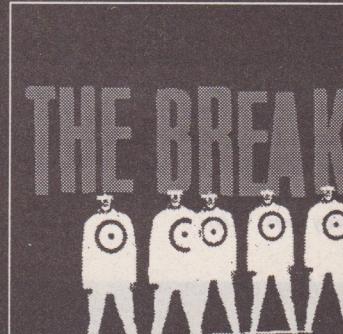
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# PAPER ZINES

## Abus Dangereux #74

French indie rock zine that comes with a 5 song sampler CD for you to throw out your fucking window. Lots of reviews and interviews...blah,blah,blah. This is for hipsters with funny hats, who listen to the strokes, and smoke lucky stripes cigarettes. (JG)

B.P. 15 33031 Bordeaux Cedex

## Burnt #4

Personal/ political/ music zine with music reviews, journal entries, poems, quotes, and some silliness. Topics include work, rhinos, abortion, racism, getting beat up, relationships, and more . . . zzzzzzzz . . . hmpf . . . zzzzzzzz . . . hmpf . . . zzzzzzzz . . . fart. (JG)

\$1 ppd or 3 stamps/trade – 400 Park Rd., Parsippany NJ 07054

## Clamor 12

From the cover, "New Perspectives on Politics, Culture, Media and Life." Features articles on gang life, campus activism, America's breast obsession, pollution by Kodak, the after effects of September 11 and America's breast obsession. Get it? I said it twice! I guess this is stuff that people should be aware of, but most of it just seems obvious or redundant to the people who are already aware. Guess what? Big businesses are bad, the media constructs unrealistic standards, gangs are fucked up, pushing too hard gives you hemorrhoids. I mean, it is too bad that more people aren't interested in these kinds of progressive ideas and issues. Like me for instance. (NS)

\$4.50, Clamor, PO Box 1225, Bowling Green, OH 43402

## Dirt Culture #5

Great layout that has some style and color even though it is on newsprint. Making the best of the situation. You get interviews with: Bouncing Souls, Sick of it All, Man or Astroman, Will Haven, Fracas, and reviews. A little thin but worth the find any ways. (EA)

PO Box 4513 Las Cruces, NM 88003

## Dream Whip #12

A very thick little 1/4" zine with stories of travel as the writer goes between South Dakota, Portland, Canada, Chicago, and many other destinations. He shares a few revelations he had on his trips. This zine is very well written and I couldn't put it down when I started reading it. Definitely worth the three bux. (TK)

PO Box 53832 Lubbock, TX 79453 (three Dollars)

## Dunk and Piss #5

You have to love any zine that starts off by relating multiple accounts of people using previous issues as toilet paper. This dude, Alex, seems to be friends with Mike from O.J. Killed Elvis. Read them both. Alex is a good writer, and Dunk and Piss is a consistently fun read. I like his story about fights he's sort of been in, and the one about how he misbehaves at the mattress store as a child and how his father responds by telling the mattress man he's retarded. I also really like the travelogue to New York City, especially how he draws attention to the cut and paste maps in the background and the typewriter font: "What's this? Dunk and Piss is now a travel zine!" (DAL)

2 stamps or trade, 11 Alger Dr., Rochester, NY 14624

## Extra #43

It's all in Japanese, so this is Greek to me. A monthly free zine that requests American punk bands to send in their music for review. Includes reviews and interviews with bands like the Suicide Machines, Chinkees, Starmarket, and the Anniversary, to name a few. (JG)

Takaya Nagashima- 2-3, Kanda Awajicho, Chiyoda-Ku Tokyo, 101-0063, Japan

## Funtime #21-22

About 85 1/2 size pages contained in this very professional looking zine. It contains a lot of interviews with bands, as well as some scene reports, but only about 2 or 3 written in English. Being a lazy American, I can't understand what most of the zine is about. It apparently was to be distributed with a Compilation CD featuring bands like: Homer, Misconduct, a200club, Easy Way Out, Flatcat, and Cast Down; but it was never received. There isn't too much more I can say about a zine I couldn't read. Nice Pictures. Solid Layout. (TK)

Andres Funtime Magazine Beukepleinbaan 30 3111 Wezemaal, Belgium

## Futurista! Modern Industry Vol. 2

Taken from the first page, "This comic book is a collaborative effort featuring dozens of artists' take on the future." I didn't see any monkey overlords or people in orange unitards or penises growing out of foreheads. Why aren't scientists working on this? I guess I have a different view of the future. Basically a diy comic book with really good drawings and so-so storylines. I never really got into comics though. Except for Archie. Now those were hilarious! (NS)

\$4, TFR Industries, 3719 SE Hawthorne #243, Portland, OR 97214

## Go Metric #14

This is a zine I used to trade with back when I did my zine (many, many years ago) and I know some of the contributors. So consider that my conflict-of-interest statement (not that conflicts are of huge concern here, I once reviewed a CD for Punk Planet by a band I used to be in). Anyway, they've been around for so long, you know they must be doing something right. I remember Go Metric as being very New York-centered, but even after a transplant to Ohio, it has kept the same tone and sensibility. This issue is classic Go Metric: irreverent and

eclectic, it's a sleeping giant among punk zines. Highlights include a power pop special with plenty of band and label interviews, first person accounts of music video making and road tripping to Canada, and some clever mayhem about football, emergency preparedness, and Harmony Korine. (DAL)

\$2, 2780 Ryewood Avenue, Apartment F, Copley, OH 44321

#### Inner Swine Vol. 7, Issue 4

I think I reviewed this guy's zine before because I remember hating it! This is why I hate most personal zines. They're so self-absorbed and boring. Oh sure, sometimes people write amusing anecdotes like, "So I rang the doorbell, and we ran, and I tripped, and I ripped my Grimple patch!" But mostly, these zines deal with the author's thoughts, which are only interesting to that person and maybe a crazy co-worker. Ah, but if you're boring, supplement your writing with allusions to getting drunk. Maybe after people read a Bukowski book, they get the idea that talking about or writing about drinking makes them funnier or more interesting. No, it's what you do with that drunkenness that makes you funny. But hey, keep up the good work, dude! (NS)

\$2, PO Box 3024, Hoboken, NJ 07030

#### Insurgente #3 2001

Politically motivated zine, which also contains many stories of personal trials and tribulations. Alejandro is a very intelligent person who writes about her activism and Chicano politics in a very thorough way. She has a lot to say. This is a very interesting read. (TK)

Alejandro Perez PO Box 37105 San Antonio, TX 78237 (Two Dollars, postage appreciated)

#### Little Black Star, Issue #3

Cool and informative four page newsletter detailing the stuff that the normal, straight news media doesn't report from idiotic anthrax raids to CNN censorship. I love this kind of stuff, especially when presented in a humorous way. Get this to find out more about our so called war in Afghanistan. Lives up to the quotes on its logo, "a bi-weekly agitator" and "the best news you've never heard". Contact them. They're looking for folks to distribute. (AS)

Autonomous Arts Collective, 113 N. Water Street, Lewisburg, PA 17837

#### Lollipop #56

Big slick magazine with free MP3 CD inside with too many too mention. Interviews with Frank Kozik, Napalm Death, Fireballs of Freedom, Foetus, Anti-Flag and more. Reads a lot like a college radio trade magazine, I don't remember the name of it, but it looks just like the one I saw all the time in my radio days. It is worth the find for the Kozik interview though. A little too mainstream for my comfort level. (EA)

[www.lollipop.com](http://www.lollipop.com)

#### Mandragora 30

This is a pretty good newsprint Metal music zine. I'm a little out of touch with modern metal, but they interview some newer bands that I've heard like Witchery, Marduk and Nile, along with some old school ones like King Diamond and Armored Saint. Some of the content hearkens back to metal's glory days, like The History Of Metal article and the review of the Thrash Of The Titans show. As with punk, it seems the metal world hasn't changed a lot since the 80's, but it still retains the charm of those metal kids in your high school who used to play in the basement of the local bowling alley. Viva Jaeben Funk! (NS)

\$3, Mandragora, PO Box Seattle, WA 98109

#### Modern Industry: Futurista, Vol. 1

Decent sized zine with comics representing many different authors/artists. Most of these deal with the future in some way. Although I like the idea, my small brain didn't seem to grasp some of the ideas put forth in the various story lines. (AS)

\$4, TFR Industries, 3719 SE Hawthorne #243, Portland, OR 97214

#### NeuFutur #1

At first this seemed to be a Christian to non-Christian transition zine due to the continuous mention of Christianity and what it meant, or did not mean to the author. Articles about Christian bands and radio play written by alleged non-Christians. It has an interview with Jeremy Goff, some reviews and personal stories. My favorite part of this release has to be the fun games (2) with the promise of a fabulous "prize pack" upon completion. Looking forward to #2. (TK)

James McQuiston 308 S Maple St Lancaster, OH 43130 (one dollar by mail, free in person)

#### No One Touches the Dream Team #6

WOW! Hilarious, bizarre and beautiful. MC Hammer said you can't touch this. Funnybone grabbers include "Chris O'Donnell is a Stupid Pie-Faced Motherfucker", "Colorado Scene Report", a fucking hilarious in-depth "Sticker Review" section, and my personal favorite rant on "NO FEAR!". If you enjoy the newspaper 'The Onion', than I'm sure you'll love this. This is the best zine I've ever reviewed. I've got a huge fucking boner right now. (JG)

Send postage or \$1 PO Box 19561 Boulder, CO 80308-2561

#### O.J. Killed Elvis #666

This isn't what you'd necessarily expect from the title, it's actually a pretty sincere, good natured personal zine/portrait of a scene. There's a very personal account of a grandmother's funeral and the writer's weird cousin Otto, and a bunch of other short personal stories from the zinester and his friends. A couple of stories about being arrested, which I always like. This is a nice mix of entertaining first person writing, enough to keep you reading for a while. And I like how Zinester Mike thanks the Binghamton PunkScene for giving him a place to be happy. That's what it's all about. (DAL)

\$1 ppd., Mike Croft, 252 Grand Ave, Apt. #1, Johnson City, NY 13740

#### Pick Your Poison #2

Over 40 pages of well-written, short stories about teen angst. Let's talk about destroying public property, dead toads, smoking dope, ditching cops, homemade tattoos, and playing with firecrackers and port-a-johns to name a few. I love getting' ghetto in the Midwest. Brings a tear to my eye. (JG)

Send \$1 to Nate Gangelhoff PO Box 8995 Minneapolis, MN 55408

#### Punk Zine #?

Fuck you. You are a fucking idiot. He desecrates Joey Ramone and the Minneapolis punk rock scene, while praising Timothy McVeigh and MXPX... huh?!? What are you, like 12 years old? I wouldn't even pick up a steaming pile of dog feces with this zine. (JG)

Send your hard earned dollar to : James, 1609 Marshall Ave. St. Paul, MN 55104

**Reflections #14**

Great hardcore zine from the label of the same name. It's packed with tons of reviews, and cool interviews with important people like Mike Thorn of MRR, Vique Martin of Revelation Records, and Tim Shaw of N'Syn (he's so much cuter than the rest of those 'boy-bands') . . . I mean ENSIGN! Almost 100 pages, and every inch is readable! HOT DAMN! (JG) [www.reflectionsrecords.com](http://www.reflectionsrecords.com)

**Ride On #5**

40 page 1/4" zine with enjoyable short personal stories that all seem to have a theme involved with them. I can relate fairly well with a lot of them. I like the writing style. Very enjoyable. (TK)

1308 W Cary St. Richmond, VA 23220-5463

**Rock N roll Purgatory #6**

Great sexy cover=, rock and roll, punk and rockabilly. A weird mix of stuff in this zine that seemingly is trying to find its identity. Agnostic Front and Hasil Adkins in the same zine. Just like my record collection this goes all over the place. Maybe that is why it was a fun read. I read through the reviews even. Order it today. (EA)

Ben Purgatory 342 S. Walnut St. Wooster, OH 44691-4756

**Rude International, Issue 6**

My friend, Marvin, is smitten with this zine for all of the wrong reasons, but I won't get into that. This is a big, glossy, dare I say magazine, that devotes its self to ska and other related music genres such as Oi, punk, and any other type that may require neatly clipped hairstyles. Although it's very informative and entertaining, I just get the weird feeling, due to the lack of good critical record reviews, that it is the product of some group of record labels. This issue's feature is on the Irish sound in punk with pieces on Flogging Molly, Dropkick Murphys, Swinging Utters, and more. Enjoyable and probably a must for ska fans. (AS)

PO Box 391302, Cambridge, MA 02139

**Short, Fast + Loud! #7**

The bible or MRR of grindcore releases done by none other than Chris Dodge himself. Was this review short enough for them? (EA)

\$2 PO Box 7337 Alhambra, CA 91802

**Sore, #13**

Well written, column/personal thoughts/short story type zine with the obligatory zine and record reviews. As you can tell by the picture of the dead trees on the cover, it leans towards the emo side of rock. (AS)

PO Box 68711, Va. Beach, VA 23471

**Spider #5**

A very cool little zine containing comics which feature people dying, stories about ghosts and encounters with strange things, and reviews. Very entertaining. (TK)

125 Cedar Crest Circle Auburn, AL 36830 (one dollar plus stamps)

**Swinj #4.5**

This is a collaborative work by a group of Salt Lake City artists. High quality production with a fold-around 7" style cover and an original sticker for each issue ordered (mine is a colorful cartoon on a post office priority mail sticker). The stand alone drawings and one page/one panel art are quite good, there's a lot of talent assembled here. Unfortunately, the comics they include are pretty pretentious and humorless. They take themselves too seriously but they sure can draw. (DAL)

\$5, Swing, PMB #7, 50 South Main St. #25, Salt Lake City, UT 84144

**Think Bad Thoughts #5**

13 pages of pointless banter, poor grammar, and sexist stories that seem to act as a poor vehicle for writing the word fuck as many times as possible. My cat is more thoughtful. The only good thing is that there is about a paragraph (if that) of text on each page, or I probably wouldn't have read the whole thing. (TK)

Joshua 781 Niblick Dr Gastonia, NC 28054

**The Third Official Publication of the Independent Republic of Josi**

This is the best zine ever. I loved it. It was much better than Cats. Or at least that's what you're tempted to say so that Josi's forces spare you when the revolution comes. Soon, Josi writes, her "star will rise and the heads will roll." Don't mess with Josi. She intersperses some content unrelated to the Republic, like a story making fun of the bible and an introduction to modular arithmetic, but most of the zine is devoted to her methodology of conquest and her plans for power. It includes an examination of torture through the ages, and Josi's personal favorite techniques, including the "copper boot." She likes it because "the pain is surprisingly great... The offender's foot is placed inside an oversized copper boot. Boiling oil is then slowly poured into the boot to strip the flesh from the bones. Ooh,

sounds painful." Man this girl is disturbed. I mean, this zine is extraordinary, President Josi. (DAL)

3-272 Iwase Aza Yachinohira, Tashiro-machi Kita Akita Gun, Akita-ken 018-3501, Japan

**Tight Pants #9**

This zine has been around and because we agree on so many issues I happen to really like Tight Pants. First off she loves garage rock and isn't afraid to admit to good records outside of said genre. She reviews records while comparing them to cereal, which at least adds some originality to the zine. One of the funnier zines out there, and her allegations (actually long article) on how emo caused the 9-11 terrorist attacks are well worth the money this time around. (EA)

Tight Pants 918 17th St. East, Apt. #1 Minneapolis, MN 55404

**Twat #4**

This was a very quick read filled with comics, top 5 lists, and guides. Quite entertaining. Although there wasn't a whole lot of content in the 10 pages, it was enough to keep me entertained.

Note: The inside cover comic entitled "Knocked up, Furry, and a Big Show-off" is very informative. I had no idea women had to deal with all that jive when they get pregnant. (complete with detailed drawings!). (TK)

Twat HQ 2360 W. Broad St. #Y1 Athens, GA 30606 (one dollar, or two stamps, or trade)

**Unshaven Chi #4**

This has a nice silk screened cover! A comic zine chronicling the creators own odd childhood experiences. The problem, to me, is like so many of the comics you find in daily newspapers, it comes off as ho-hum and not funny. Just like after looking at 'Family Circus', I found myself saying "...so fucking what...". Nice looking though. (JG)

\$2 - Ben T. Steckler, PO Box 7273 York, PA 17404

**Waste of Ink #1**

Exactly what you'd expect from an 18 year old college freshman with no experience in the 'real world'. Post 9/11 comments and opinions on consumerism, government, racism, etc., with random anti-flag lyrics thrown in here and there. Combine this with a cut-out skinhead doll and 115 reasons to be punk and I want to shit in my pants and vomit because my shit smells so rancid. (JG)

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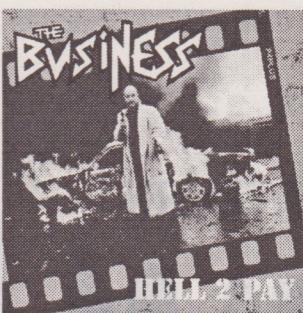
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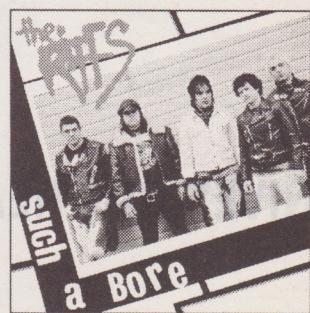
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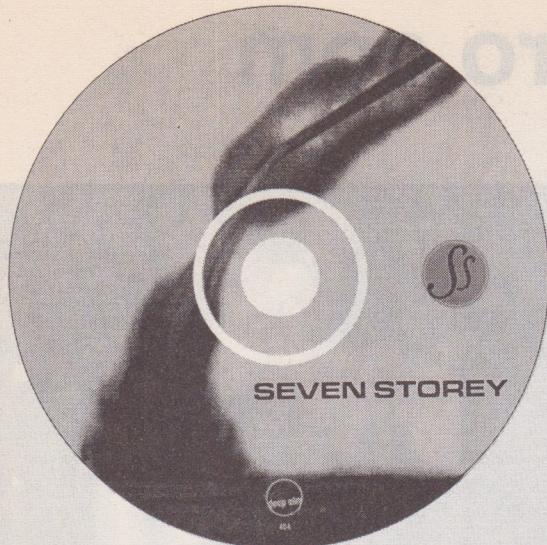
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# PAPER BOOKS

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By Noam Chomsky  
Seven Stories Press

To give the man due credit, it's hard to think of another radical who so robustly represents the failure of progressive thought in the United States as Noam Chomsky.

Chomsky lives in a Newtonian universe of leftism where political mass and gravitational effects are predictable, and where good and bad actors spin in a foreordained social dance. All political developments are subject to interpretation within this now-ossified model, enunciated beginning with his opposition to the Vietnam War in the 1960s. This is a peculiarly American model that, while identified within the US left's core literature, resists global manifestations of class difference and capitalism-as-system as explanatory contributions towards the problems it addresses. The Americaness of this model lies in its insistence on the rule of pragmatic facts, or as William James phrased it, in a turn towards alleged "concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action and towards power."

Although Chomsky has been criticized many times for this anti-economistic and anti-theoretical blindness, he has not made any substantive changes in his analytic style. And it is *style* in which he engages, since labor, capital and markets are notably absent from his writing. Government actions happen largely by themselves in Chomsky's model, but the

social propulsion behind those actions lies beyond germane discussion.

In the land of uninterpreted facts, blandness rules. Style is quintessential within politics, whatever horrified and righteous protests from promoters of substance to the exclusion of style. It is precisely the earnestness of style that appeals to such sober-minded believers who take up the latest Chomsky *pronunciamento* as a substitute for a quiet evening of self-flagellation.

For all of Chomsky's insistence on common-sense analysis and historical rigor, he indulges in constant subject changes and historical ellipsis. As this small volume of seven post-attack Chomsky interviews exemplifies, he slides off the subject of September 11 like it was a well-polished playground slide just waiting for a head-dive. In Chomsky's politics such events are epiphenomena to incorporate within his decades-long lecture and established intellectual model. September 11 only provides the excuse and book title; this is an interpretive chapbook for guidance to the political faithful.

The excursion begins with a simple postulate from which flows all manner of derivatives: the United States is the leading terrorist state. Mr. Smith isn't going to Washington; Mr. Smith is going to Terrorism Central. Why ever do Chomsky-quoters wonder why their hero isn't invited to address a special joint session of Congress?

Chomsky prefers to indict the history of European colonization reaching

back quite literally to Columbus, as if this provided any assistance towards formulating a policy response to events just six months past. Rather, this retrospective invocation accepts a view of world history as simplistically bifurcated as any Samuel Huntingdon has produced. In this historical meta-perspective, the collapse of the WTC twin towers was no more than natives returning fire at European civilization. By locating his initial analysis of 9/11 events within an overarching accusation against the US as the illegitimate product of a half-millennium's worth of imperialistic sin, Chomsky only recapitulates the basic theme of his earlier *Year 501* (1993). Despite his own arguments, in the sixth of these interviews Chomsky precisely rejects two-civilization theories. Acceptability seems to depend on who uses such reductions.

No nation-state exists without an inheritance of pre-foundational violence and a history of violent self-maintenance, so adopting the pose of History's prosecutor-general provides no analytic light with which to examine the contemporary American Empire. Al-Qaeda operatives did not hijack and crash airliners as a belated protest over the empire-building 1848 war against Mexico. They did so for their own reasons, apparently religio-cultural xenophobia, and certainly not out of compassion for the struggles of other peoples for self-determination.

At street level, historical awareness of colonialism and imperialism does not

equate with the realities of political decision-making after morning coffee. Chomsky's reductionism operates at the level of opposed global cultures and nation-states, which is not too different from the classical political science formulations of Henry Kissinger or Samuel Huntington from otherwise inimical points of view. All three built analytic philosophies within the academic trap of compassionless determinism, where *model-meisters* rule.

The entire book does not contain more than one word of sympathy or solidarity towards September 11 victims. Chomsky's stern philosophical style does not embrace empathy, which for better or worse represents the contested heartland of American politics. This is a remarkable absence, unconscionable for its dismissal of human lives as sub-history. As a political traumatologist speaking to the international press (a majority of interviews published here are with European media), Chomsky adopts the manner of a Puritan minister on the fate of sinners in the United States. In his unrelenting moral sobriety, Chomsky remains incapable of articulating rhetoric of sympathetic and passionate identification with a US voting public that can alter national policies. September 11 becomes only another excuse to exercise moral castigation.

In the one moment that Chomsky does utter sympathy for the day's victims, he manages to simultaneously mischaracterize global reaction as "virtually unanimous" in its outrage. Yet it was precisely the reports of approval broadcast on CNN and Al-Jazeera and in other regional media that worked to define the global fault lines that have developed in the attack's wake. It was not

only an act that caused massive human suffering, but it is difficult to imagine another act that could work to such mutual advantage for Western racists and Islamic cultural isolationists.

Faced with a need to find international justice and social peace between the United States, Europe and the Middle East, where is Chomsky? Actually, he's still discussing Nicaragua. Lengthy and repeated passages address the Reagan administration's policies towards the Sandinista government as an example of terrorism and illegitimate state violence, once condemned by the World Court. Ollie North clones may well populate the Pentagon and need regular applications of pesticide from Congress, but this is not the topic at hand. Chomsky has mastered digression in pursuit of high ideals.

Chomsky's digressions are a means of avoiding unpalatable conclusions. He uses this same technique in the present book as much as on previous excursions into print. For example, nearly all of *The New Military Humanism*'s discussions of the Racak massacre concerns events in East Timor, where he points out unassailably that many more were murdered in Dilli than in Racak. Yet what relevance does this observation bear to the question of whether NATO should act in defense of European Moslem minorities being massacred and expelled from their homes? None at all, other than as an argumentative diversion.

Listening this past week to Milosevic in the Hague inveigh against NATO hegemony and appropriate the language of anti-globalism, nausea rises to the gorge upon realizing that this unrepentant defense of genocide relies on the same arguments that Chomsky made and

continues to deploy in 9-11. It is telling that Chomsky-style arguments gain use as a defense of violence on the grounds that it represents opposition to political hegemonism, as if this were sufficient justification of itself. So, while deplored Bin Laden, Chomsky can describe him as but another noxious product of the American Empire.

That is much, much too simple, for Bin Laden and al-Qaeda are violent theo-fascists who represent a public safety menace and need more effective address than armchair citations of international law chapter and verse. The means of peaceful redress against the Bush administration and its business cronies are well-known in this relatively democratic society. Dealing with a right-wing administration is a political contest within a civil society; dealing with a violent religious underground is a very different species of contest. To frame the questions precisely, what are the legitimate and effective means of social defense against an international theo-fascist movement, and how can its originating causes be ameliorated? It is such questions that Chomsky entirely begs off.

In the end, there is an unmistakable stench of the Old Guard arising from this book. The usual suspects (Ruggiero, Barsamian, Albert) conduct mostly e-mail interviews with the Man, he repeats previous musings interlaced with fresh news, and an editor adds some overseas material in order to rush a hot manuscript to the printer barely a month after the September 11 attacks. This is the inside talking with the inside, then publishing a lazy version of a quickie book. Sadly, this can pass for progressive politics in the United States. ©

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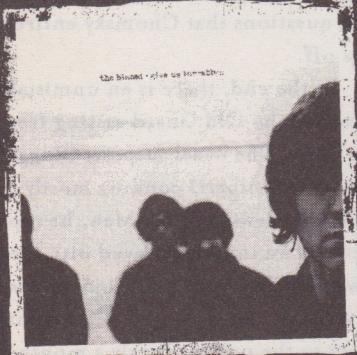
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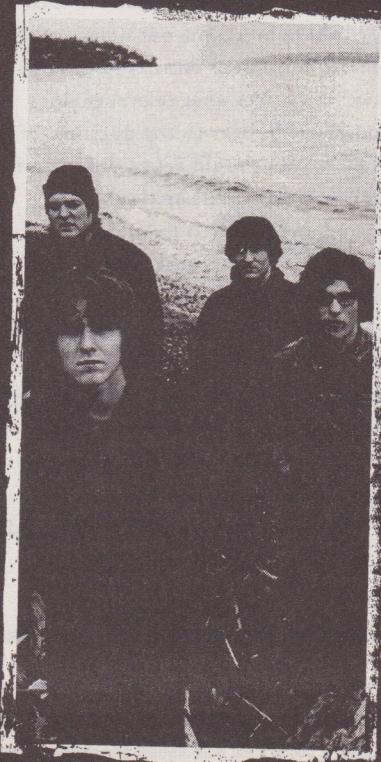
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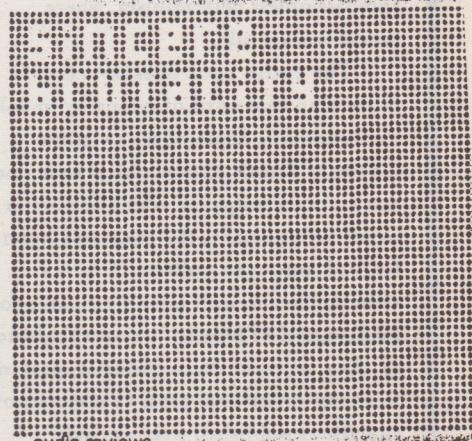


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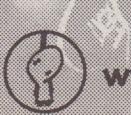
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**PP37** May/June 2000 CRIME AND JUSTICE 2000. In three articles, PP37 takes a look at the sorry state of the American criminal justice system. POLICE BRUTALITY is looked at in the article "War in the Streets." YOUTH ORGANIZING AROUND PROPOSITION 21 is investigated in "No Power like the Youth" and the PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX is exposed in "Crisis and Control." Interviews in this issue include STELLA MARRS; J-CHURCH'S LANCE HAHN; STEPHEN DUNCOMBE, author of ZINES AND THE POLITICS OF ALTERNATIVE CULTURE; the EVOLUTION CONTROL COMMITTEE; O AND NOT U; EXHUMED FILMS; HORACE PINKER; and the story of STALAG 13, a Philadelphia-based punk club that was shut down by the city, fought to be reopened and won. Finally, PP37 takes a look at the SAD STATE OF THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE and PP takes a peek at the lawsuit between the RECORDING INDUSTRY OF AMERICA AND MP3.COM. Plus more. 144 pgs.

**PP38** July/August 2000 VOICES OF THE NEW LEFT. PP takes a look at the new anti-globalism movement. Interviewed in the "Voices" series are NOAM CHOMSKY, JELLO BIAFRA, DIRECT ACTION NETWORK, RUCKUS SOCIETY, QUEER TO THE LEFT and GLOBAL EXCHANGE. Also interviewed in this issue, BOY SETS FIRE, UNWOUND talk about building their new recording studio, post-hardcore label HYDRAHEAD RECORDS, controversial publisher SOFT SKULL BOOKS, MELVINS bassist Joe Preston talks about his project THE THRONES, electronic artist LESSER checks in and art rockers LES SAVY FAV yap at you. Also, PP38 takes a look at the growing RAPTIVIST movement. Additionally, PP38 looks at the GROWING ANTI-WALMART MOVEMENT. Much more. 156 pgs.

**PP39** Sept/Oct 2000 Six years after punk "broke" into the mainstream, Punk Planet talks to many of the bands involved, GREEN DAY, JAWBREAKER, JAWBOX, SAMIAM, GIRLS AGAINST BOYS, THE SMOKING POPES, FACE TO FACE, JIMMY EAT WORLD, TEXAS IS THE REASON. Think you know what happened?

Think again. Also in this issue: interviews with KILL ROCK STARS founder SLIM MOON; THE EXPLOSION; MARY TIMONY; SUE COE; ULTRA-RED; DIS-INFO.COM; and the CENTRAL OHIO ABORTION ACCESS FUND. Articles in this issue include a look at how groups like the WTO ARE EFFECTING THE LIVES OF THE GREAT APES; a report on the CHICAGO POST-ROCK SCENE; and noted economist Doug Henwood writes "BOOM FOR WHOM" which puts a new perspective on the "new" economy. 152 pgs.

**PP40** November/December '00. MEET THE NEW BOSS Through interviews with controversial biographers, Punk Planet #40 envisions the hell that the Bush presidency will be—and the hell that a Gore presidency would have been. PP40 also features interviews with INSONG.COM; The Fucking Champs' TIM GREEN; ELECTRICAL AUDIO; Anarchist theorist JOHN ZERZAN; MARCELLE DIALLO; VERSO BOOKS; MILEMARKER; and MATMOS. Articles in PP40 include a look at the WAR THE GOVERNMENT IS WAGING AGAINST THE NAVAJO INDIANS in Big Mountain, AZ, the PLIGHT OF C NUMBER PRISONERS IN ILLINOIS and a look back at WELFARE REFORM. 152 pgs.

**PP41** February 2000 PUTTING DC ON THE MAP. PP41 takes a look at the history of the DC punk scene. From the influence of the Bad Brains to the birth of Minor Threat; from a violent Ian MacKaye to a not-yet-Rollins Henry Garfield. PP41 offers a revealing and detailed look into punk's past. Interviews in pp41 include: (INTERNATIONAL) NOISE CONSPIRACY, THE WIPERS, THE LOCUST, TNI BOOKS, and DIY reggae pioneers RAS RECORDS. Articles in PP41 include a look at POETRY SLAMS and a devastating look at the BOMBING OF A COLOMBIAN VILLAGE. Additionally in PP41 is an inspiring talk with SUE MECCA, a 40-year-old punk rock mom. Plus, DIY tips, columns, reviews and much, much more. 144 pgs.

**PP42** FINDING LIFE ON DEATH ROW These unique conversations with three people who have been sent to death row (two are still there) bring readers beyond the numbers and into the cell itself.

Interviews in this issue include: AMPHETAMINE REPTILE RECORDS calls it quits, SAMIAM, JETS TO BRAZIL'S JEREMY CHATELAIN talks about his solo work, filmmaker ANDREW DICKSON, members of the powerful Seattle band THE GITS look back at the death of their singer Mia, and hip-hop culture mag BLU keeps it real. Also interviewed in PP42 is ALI ABUNIMAH, a young Palestinian activist who has helped turn the media tide during the latest Arab uprising in Israel. Articles in PP42 include a look at the growing anti-psychiatry movement—drug companies convincing us we're sick in order to turn a profit. The revealing DIARY OF A PHONE SEX WORKER lets readers peer into the world on the other side of the receiver. And PEDAL POWER chronicle's one woman's travels into the radical pro-bike movement. PP42 also includes all the columns, reviews, DIY and more that you've loved over the years. 136 pgs.

**PP43** BECOME THE MEDIA PP43's 36 page cover section gives readers DIY tips on how to edit digital video, how to set up a low-power radio station, how to record audio, how to program HTML, how to build a web-based audio feed, how to shoot video, how to program Flash animations and much, much more. In addition to those tips BECOME THE MEDIA also looks at the history of the INDEPENDENT MEDIA CENTER, who are setting the media world on end. BECOME THE MEDIA also features pieces about YOUTH MEDIA, the ZAPATISTAS AND TECHNOLOGY, NEWSREEL, and COMMUNITY ACTIVIST TECHNOLOGY. This issue is a must have for anyone interested in the new media revolution.

Also featured in PP43 are interviews with radical historian HOWARD ZINN, rockers ROCKET FROM THE CRYPT (fresh off being dumped from a major label), "emo diaries" kingpin DEEP ELM RECORDS, author SHAWNA KENNY, who wrote I WAS A TEENAGE DOMINATRIX, laptop rocker KID 606, religious zealots THE CAUSEY WAY, and the masterminds behind the PUPPET STREET PROJECT. Additionally, PP43 features all the stuff readers have come to expect over the last

seven years: columns, reviews, and much more. 144 pgs.

**PP44** THE WEAKERTHANS, one of the finest punk outfits to come along in the last few years grace the cover of PP44. This interview, performed by longtime Punk Planet contributor Larry Livermore, probes the mind of Weakerthans frontman JOHN SAMSON. In their conversation, Livermore and Samson go from poetry to revolution and back again. Truly an engaging and inspiring talk with one of punk's newest heroes. Also interviewed in this issue: MR LADY RECORDS is profiled through talks with the label owners and the artists they release; futuristic hip-hop duo DELTRON 3030; Pacific Northwest metal punk LORDS OF LIGHTSPEED; electronic music pioneer THOMAS DIMUZIO; HALF JAPANESE's legendary JAD FAIR; Pacific Northwest politi-rockers THE INTIMA; and \$5 CD label PLAN-IT-X RECORDS. Articles this issue include: UNIVERSAL RECORD'S ACQUISITION OF E-MUSIC—it may not sound all that exciting, but this business-section errata finds many independent labels not so independent anymore; reporter Heather Haddon looks at the ABUSE OF FEMALE PRISONERS IN AMERICA; new associate editor Chris Ziegler gives a hilarious behind-the-scenes look at SOUTH BY SOUTHWEST; PP investigates SLAUGHTER OF WILD BUFFALO IN MONTANA; and PUNKS REMEMBER JOEY RAMONE in a moving tribute. All this, plus all the DIY, columns, reviews, and much much more! 144 pgs.

**PP45** DOUBLE FEATURE cover story! This issue not only shines the spotlight on consumer-rights activist, 2000 presidential candidate, and all-around hellraiser RALPH NADER, but it also features an in-depth interview with uncompromising independents SHELLAC. Just for you, PP45 serves up a little double trouble—two cover stories for the price of one! Also interviewed in this issue: Latino punk entertainer EL VEZ; author PLESANT GEHMAN; analog electronic rockers MOUSE ON MARS; the new band to emerge from the ashes of Smart Went Crazy, THE BEAUTY PILL;

queer zinemaker RUDY SCUTTER; filmmaker STEPHANIE BLACK; and independent country-rocker and death-penalty activist STEVE EARL. Articles in this issue include a hair-raising look at THE YAZOO BACKWATER PUMP PROJECT IN THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA—these pumps, if built, could bring environmental devastation to this fragile region; BACK TO SHATILLA follows author Ali Abunimah as he visits a Palestinian refugee camp; and HONDURAS: THE OTHER COLUMBIA looks at the US's secret involvement in the Honduran government's war against its own people. Plus columns, reviews, DIY and much, much more! 144 pgs

**PP46** ART & DESIGN 2! PP46 features FOUR LIMITED EDITION COVERS this time by artists JAIME HERNANDEZ (LOVE & ROCKETS COMICS), SHEPARD FAIRY (OBEY GIANT POSTERS), NIKKI MCCLURE (Olympia, WA paper-cut artist) and JAY RYAN (Chicago, IL poster artist). Interviews in Art & Design 2 include Hernandez, Fairy, McClure, and Ryan along with filmmaker SADIE SHAW, designer ELLIOT EARLES, graffiti artists JOCYLIN SUPERSTAR and LITTLE MISS ATTITUDE, San Francisco's not-for-profit POND GALLERY, and CRASS collageist GEE VAUCHER. Articles in A&D2 include a profile of CHICAGO'S RADICAL STREET ARTISTS THE DEPARTMENT OF SPACE AND LAND RECLAMATION, an overview of DIY COMICS, a story about the MURALS OF CHICAGO'S PILSEN NEIGHBORHOOD, and a look at the PROJET MOBILIVRE/BOOKMOBILE PROJECT that is bringing zines and artist books into underserved neighborhoods. Plus reviews, columns, DIY and more. 168 pgs.

**PP47** WAR SONGS. Punk Planet #47 takes stock of the Bush administration's WAR AGAINST TERRORISM. Is it effective? Is it moral? Is it legal? We pose the questions that the mainstream media isn't asking to experts—the answers are eye-opening to say the least. PP47 dedicates an entire section to looking at the war from many different angles in interviews, essays, and articles. Sure to be controversial, PP47 pulls no punches in its analysis of the war. But it's not just bombs and tanks in this issue of Punk Planet—after taking

an issue off to write about art & design, PP47 returns with tons of great music interviews. Interviewed in this issue are: classic queer punk TOM ROBINSON reminiscences on the spirit of '77; Pacific Northwest stalwarts UNWOUND; the Indigo Girls' AMY RAY talks about her independent solo project; dyke punks THE HAGGARD take their bikes out for a spin; buzz band THURSDAY drops some knowledge; XBXRX gives their last interview; and Punk Planet helps MINT RECORDS celebrate their 10 year anniversary. Also interviewed just in time for the Olympics: the BURN THE OLYMPICS collective—a secretive group of activists devoted to direct action against the 2002 Olympic Games. In addition to the war coverage, and tons of interviews, PP47 features reviews, columns, fiction, DIY and more.

**PP48** TO HELL AND BACK. Operating under the name George Eric Hawthorne, George Burdi was the flag-bearer and general of the mid-'90s neo-nazi youth movement. But a 1995 jail term found Burdi questioning his own beliefs, and when he was free, he left the neo-nazi movement. In "To Hell and Back", Punk Planet 48 catches up with Burdi to talk about his past, his transformation, and his future. Controversial and disturbing, yet ultimately moving, this feature-length interview is not to be missed! Also interviewed in this issue: the unstoppable women-led band ERASE ERRATA; garage rock genre jumpers THE DIRT-BOMBS; electronic sound artist OVAL; Afro-beat radicals ANTIBALAS; street punk superstars THE SWINGING UTTERS; and radical educator and poet DEMETRAI MARTINEZ. Any articles in PP48? You betcha. Punk Planet looks at the DEATH OF DISTRIBUTION GIANT VALLEY and what the loss of a giant one-stop means for independents. PP travels to look at the FAILED DOLLARIZATION OF ECUADOR; and Andrew Dickson talks about TOURING WITH A DIY FILM. Need more? How about a DIY ON TRAVELLING AND WORKING ABROAD, plus columns, reviews, and much, much more.

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# see also

Where to find more information about this issue's features.

## interviewed this issue:

### Mike Watt

Up-to-date listings of Watt's near-continuous touring schedule, a complete list of current interviews with Watt, photos, writings, and albums for sale are on Watt's own webpage: [www.hootpage.com](http://www.hootpage.com)

### Federation X

FedX is online at:  
<http://www.geocities.com/federationxonline/>

Their album, *American Folk Horror* is available from:  
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Bellingham, WA 98225  
[www.estrus.com](http://www.estrus.com)

### New End Original

NEO's album *Thriller* is available from:  
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[www.jadetree.com](http://www.jadetree.com)

### Electrelane

Electrelane can be contacted through their own record label, Let's Rock Records:  
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Or they are online at: [www.electrelane.com](http://www.electrelane.com)

Their album, *Rock it to the Moon* is great and available from:

Mr. Lady Records  
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Durham, NC 27715-3189  
[www.mrlady.com](http://www.mrlady.com)

### Aldolfo Perez Esquivel

The "dirty war" in Argentina is over, but the 30,000 that "disappeared" during the war are still missing and unaccounted for. The Government has shielded and pardoned those responsible. For more a complete set of links to information about human rights abuses in Argentina, visit:  
<http://www.derechos.org/nizkor/arg/eng.html>

### Hot Water Music

HWM's official website is online at:  
[http://hwm.indiepress.com/](http://hwm.indiepress.com)

Their most recent album, *A Flight And A Crash*, is available from:

Epitaph Records  
[www.epitaph.com](http://www.epitaph.com)

Previous albums are available from:

No Idea Records: [www.noidearecords.com](http://www.noidearecords.com)

### the Rapture

The Rapture's 2001 EP *Out of the Races and Onto the Tracks* is available from:

Sub Pop Records  
[www.subpop.com](http://www.subpop.com)

### XLR8R

*XLR8R* magazine is available at finer newsstands and record shops everywhere, or online at [www.xlr8r.com](http://www.xlr8r.com).

### Richard Hell

Hell's official website is online at (where else):  
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His album, *Time*, is available from:

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## articles in this issue:

### Business as Usual? The Rocky Rise of Vagrant Records

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### Life and Death: the Alex Sanchez Story

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[www.homiesunidos.org](http://www.homiesunidos.org)

### Banned in the USA

John Clarke is an organizer for the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty. They are located at:  
249 Sherbourne St.  
Toronto, ON M51 2R9 Canada

The OCAP is also online: [www.ocap.ca](http://www.ocap.ca)

### "I Felt Like Part of My Body was Buried in El Salvador"

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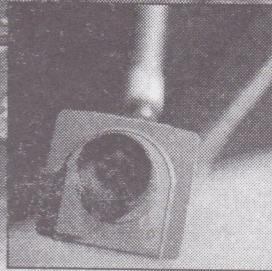
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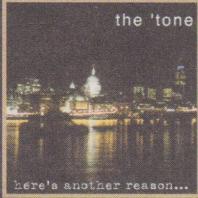
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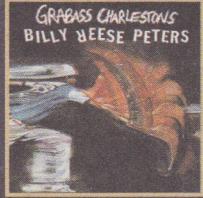
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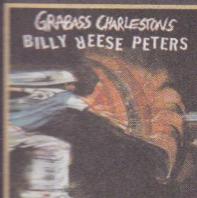


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